

The Kingdom of God and the Presbyterian Churches
Social Theology and Action
c.1880 – c.1914

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines how the two strands which made up Presbyterianism in Scotland in the years between 1830 and 1914 coped with the challenges presented to them by the urban crisis which arose in the 1830s and 1840s. The huge increase in the urban population which experienced the effects of cyclical trade depressions and consequent unemployment posed an unprecedented problem to a system of poor relief unable to cope. That system of poor relief was initially provided through voluntary contributions made by the Kirk Session and Heritors of the Church of Scotland. Even after poor relief became the responsibility of Parochial Boards, these Boards were largely composed of office-bearers in the Church.

The study covers the years from around 1830 to the outbreak of the First World War. 1830 was chosen because by then the effect of industrial change was beginning to be felt and from then onwards accelerated considerably, most especially in Paisley where traditional weaving soon began to decline. The immigrant population, drawn to Glasgow by the prospect of work, had settled into the subdivided tenements and partitioned town houses which were to cause social problems for the rest of the century. The population of Glasgow grew from around 274,000 in 1830 to 761,000 by the turn of the century, and the Churches found themselves having to address the social problems which grew along with the size of the city. This study ends with the outbreak of the First World War, by which time the beginnings of the welfare state had been established and the energies of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland began to be focussed on the process which was to lead to their union in 1929.

The study concentrates largely on the west of Scotland because most of the larger studies of the ecclesiastical history of the period have concentrated on Edinburgh and made use of Edinburgh sources. This study is an attempt to redress the balance, but also to recognise that it was in the west of Scotland, first in Paisley with the collapse of the weaving industry and then in Glasgow with the housing crisis which the increase in population through immigration brought about.

This study follows two methods. Because its central argument is that Robert Flint's book *Christ's Kingdom upon Earth*, published in 1865, was of crucial importance in the development of a social theology in the Presbyterian Churches of the 19th century, this is an example of historical theology within the history of ideas, and so the research which reflects this aspect of the study has been based on the examination and critical assessment of theological publications, pamphlets, sermons and speeches of the period, all of which provide a rich vein of material on which the conclusions can be based. Because the effect of Robert Flint's understanding of the Kingdom of God was found initially in the work of those most closely influenced by him, and then later on the context which the theological matrix of the Kingdom of God provided for debates within particularly the United Free Church, this study examines the narrative of the Church's engagement with society over the period under review, and has involved the study of original church and municipal sources.

The Scottish Churches addressed the question of poverty during the period under review in two ways. At a practical level, churches attempted to adapt their systems of territorial ministry to provide support for those experiencing urban deprivation.

The attitude towards the urban social crisis and the work of four churchmen in the years immediately following the Disruption, Patrick Brewster in the Abbey and Robert Burns in St George's Church in Paisley, and Robert Buchanan in the Tron and Norman Macleod in the Barony in Glasgow will be examined. Donald Macleod's widely accepted judgment of Patrick Brewster and of the mid-nineteenth century clergy will be questioned. Where there were people of the calibre of Brewster, Burns, Buchanan and Macleod the use of a territorial ministry was still, but only just sustainable. As the scale of the urban problem became clear, and the capacity of the traditional poor law system based on territorial parishes proved incapable of coping with it, the Churches tried to adapt, first, through the provision through church congregations of voluntary methods of support. Second, the Church began to question the conviction of Thomas Chalmers, which largely dictated its attitude to social questions at the time, that it was the character of individuals and the communities they made up which shaped the environment around them. Encouraged by Flint, progressive ministers began to recognise the effect of the environment on the individual's character and potential. As the Corporation of the city of Glasgow increasingly took over responsibility for the environment of the city, becoming involved in housing conditions and the provision of a whole range of practical and social services, the insight of Flint that the Church must co-operate with other agencies in improving the environment was vital in encouraging progressive ministers to involve the Church with municipal agencies which grew rapidly during the period under review. Increasingly this involved the Churches in developing a social theology which expressed the Christian faith in terms which reflected the increasing obligation felt within the churches to regard what was described as "the social

question as of as much importance for the Church as its missionary and evangelical responsibilities.

Other studies have addressed the challenge the urban crisis presented to the churches. Donald Smith's 1963 PhD thesis¹ subsequently published in 1987² is a detailed examination of the history of social criticism in the Scottish Presbyterian Churches which examines the evidence from the standpoint of Smith's basic thesis: that with the exception of Patrick Brewster's ministry in Paisley Abbey from 1828 to 1856 the Presbyterian churches made little protest about social conditions until the early 1880s, and produced little by way of social theology until reports presented to the United Free Church General assembly towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century.

Professor A.C. Cheyne's 1987 study of *The Transforming of the Kirk* shares much of Smith's criticism of the nineteenth century's complacency in the face of urban deprivation, though it is expressed with less anger, and places the eventual revolution in the Churches' attitude towards social issues within a larger context of reform including the Churches' reaction to biblical criticism, its response to the questioning of theological certainty and the review of its forms and patterns of worship.

In the 1970s, two pioneering articles by Donald Withrington explored the crisis facing the Churches and the development of a new social conscience.³ The earlier article

¹ SMITH, D.C., "The Failure and Recovery of Social Criticism in the Scottish Church", Edinburgh University PhD thesis, 1963

² SMITH, D.C., 1987, *Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest, Social Criticism in the Scottish Church, 1830-1954*, (SMITH, *Passive Obedience*)

³ WITHRINGTON, D.J., , "The Churches in Scotland: c 1870 – c 1900: Towards a New Social Conscience, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, vol,XIX, 1977

paid tribute to Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang for leading a crusade to improve the housing of the urban poor, first through the Presbytery of Glasgow's Housing Commission and later through the General Assembly's Home Mission Committee chaired by Macleod, and the Commission to Enquire into the Religious Condition of the People, chaired by Marshall Lang. This article also noted reports on social policy presented to the United Free Church of Scotland towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. In his second article Withrington describes the established Presbytery of Glasgow "led by" Lang and Macleod taking the housing issue to the Church of Scotland General Assembly, and refers to books published at the time by Marshall Lang, the United Presbyterian minister Scott Matheson, and others, as evidence of the development of a new social conscience within the Presbyterian Churches,

The nineteen nineties saw the work of D.C. Smith, A.C. Cheyne and D. Withrington carried forward in closer examination of the theme of the church's engagement with social issues in the nineteen and early twentieth centuries by S.J. Brown and C.G. Brown. In an article in 1990, S.J. Brown examined the effect of the negotiations for the union of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church in 1929 on the social vision of Scottish Presbyterianism.⁴ Brown points out that following the post war election of 1918, which enabled the Conservative Party to dominate a Coalition Government "which withdrew from its promises of social reconstruction, leaders of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church also began to silence the Church's

WITHRINGTON, D.J., "Non-Churchgoing, c1750-c1850, A Preliminary Study", *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, Vol XVII, 1972

⁴ BROWN, S.J., 1990, "The Social Vision of Scottish Presbyterianism and the union of 1929" in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 1990, Vol xx, pp 77-96

call for a new Christian social order.”⁵ Although in the United Free Church calls for social reconstruction continued to be made, “the United Free Church Assembly, however, was no longer prepared to countenance criticisms of industrial capitalism or calls for a new economic order”.⁶ In a later article,⁷ S J Brown surveyed in more detail the social vision of Scottish Presbyterianism in the century from 1830 to 1930 and identified in the Victorian era three fundamental assumptions which defined, and to a large extent restricted the social ideal of the Presbyterian Churches: the primacy of personal conversion and moral improvement, that society no less than the natural world was governed by inexorable laws, and the continued validity of the communal ideal of Thomas Chalmers expressed through a parochial system. Brown concludes that “mid Victorian Presbyterians did much to aid the inevitable social wreckage of industrial capitalism”.⁸ Brown draws attention to the work of Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang as late Victorian progressives committed to social justice in Glasgow and to a growing commitment to the realisation of the Kingdom of God within the United Free Church to which hostile reaction grew following the end of the war in 1918.

In 1997, C.G. Brown published his survey of religion and society in Scotland since 1707.⁹ which stressed the positive impact of secularisation rather than the negative concentration on the decline of the Church in urban society. Brown argued that the Presbyterian Churches, faced with an increasingly secular urban society abandoned their commitment to parochial missionary and social work and instead concentrated

⁵ .Ibid., p 87

⁶ Ibid., p 88

⁷ BROWN, S.J., 1991, “Reform, Reconstruction, Reaction: The Social Vision of Scottish Presbyterianism c1830-c1930” in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol 44, pp 489-517

⁸ Ibid., p 495

⁹ BROWN, C.G., 1997, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, Edinburgh

on congregational life and social organisations. An article by C.G. Brown in 1996¹⁰ C.G. Brown argued that in what he calls “the heyday of municipal collectivism”, the Presbyterian Churches produced a civic gospel to match civic pride. Brown finds early evidence of this in the views of the Glasgow Free Church minister Robert Buchanan in the years following the Disruption and also in “the new breed of Established Church clergy including John Marshall Lang, Donald Macleod and David Watson, and a number of leading lay figures”.

From the literature on the developing role of the Presbyterian Churches in the west of Scotland between 1830 and the outbreak of World War 1, a consensus has emerged which pictures an accelerating expression of social concern and a developing formulation of a social theology. With what D.C. Smith calls “the unique exception” of Patrick Brewster of Paisley Abbey the middle years of the nineteenth century were marked not only by the Church’s complacency towards social conditions but a determination on the part of the Church to regard the evangelical work of the Church and the formation of worshipping communities as the only contribution which the Church could make to the alleviation of social problems. Housing conditions in Glasgow provided a focus for the expression of social concern by the Presbyter of Glasgow and so, gradually, due to the work of Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang in the Presbytery and then in General Assembly, the Church of Scotland the Church of Scotland became committed to the reform of society, and began to work out a social theology. The United Free Church, however, went further and produced reports of social criticism which subjected social conditions to more rigorous

¹⁰ BROWN, C.G., “To be aglow with civic ardours”: the ‘Godly Commonwealth’ in Glasgow, 1843-1914 in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, XXVI, 1996

examination. The main argument of this study is that until the late 1860s, the only theological model which the Churches in Scotland possessed to handle both changes in society and the clamant need for social reform was one which regarded social conditions, first, as less important than eternal salvation, and, second as capable of improvement only through the evangelical conversion and resulting moral improvement of the individual. It is illegitimate to criticise the Church for advocating the only response to deprivation which was available to it at the time. It is equally unfair to regard the Church's evangelical commitment as complacency when it was firmly believed that evangelical commitment would reduce social ills. However, with the publication of Robert Flint's *Kingdom of Christ upon Earth* in 1865 the Church was given an entirely new model for its involvement with society and the expression of a social theology. Flint's entirely novel interpretation of the Kingdom of God, and in particular his insistence that the Kingdom of God and the Church of Christ were not identical offered a paradigm shift which stimulated the practical involvement and social theology of progressives within the Church in the final years of the nineteenth century. The originality of Flint's views will be examined in the context of contemporary ecclesiological writing. The personal and literary connections between Flint, Donald Macleod and Marshall Lang will be explored.

Thus the place of the Kingdom of God in the thinking of Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang will be examined. The significance of the Kingdom of God for those who followed them, David Watson in the Church of Scotland and William Clow, Scott Matheson, William Dickie and Robert Drummond within the United Free Church will be examined, because it provides the important context within which debates on social policy within the United Free Church were conducted

Against the background of the vital importance of the concept of the Kingdom of God, this study will challenge the accepted view of the Church's developing social conscience at a number of critical points. It will suggest that the evidence indicates a less favourable judgment on Patrick Brewster and a more sympathetic assessment of his contemporaries' involvement in social reform. It will suggest that the consistent linking of the names of Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang risks ignoring serious differences between the two men, but, more importantly, denies the equally important part played in the Presbytery of Glasgow's involvement with housing conditions and policy of Glasgow minister Frederick Lockhart Robertson. It will indicate that the Presbytery of Glasgow as a whole was less supportive of, committed to and involved in the much-praised Housing Commission than the accepted picture would imply. It will take account of significant differences between the attitude of the Church of Scotland and that of the United Free Church to social issues and the tendency of the Church of Scotland to be more sympathetic to landlords of urban housing than was the United Free Church. It will show how the tensions which emerged within the United Free Church were expressed in terms not simply of support for and opposition to social engagement but of differing attitudes to the Kingdom of God. And it will suggest that support for a critical social theology was unravelling in the United Free Church in the years before the outbreak of war in 1914.

Chapter 1

THE LURE OF THE CHURCH AND ITS TERRITORIAL IDEAL

Introduction

The work of four ministers of religion, Patrick Brewster and Robert Burns, working within half a mile of each other in Paisley, and Robert Buchanan and Norman MacLeod not much further apart in Glasgow provides contrasting approaches to different aspects of the urban crisis. An examination of their work, practical and published, also presents a challenge to some of the widely accepted judgments about the Church's role in the urban crisis.

Patrick Brewster was minister of the second charge of Paisley Abbey from 1818 till his death in 1859. He was a charismatic preacher, a moral force Chartist, of whom it was said by a contemporary that "it was his infirmity to provoke opposition; and like a salamander, he enjoyed the furnace of controversy just the more that it was seven times heated, even to whiteness".¹¹ That judgment, however, can only be applied to Brewster after 1835. There is no evidence before then, in local press or his early published sermons, of a controversialist's disposition.

Donald Smith's now widely accepted thesis, that the mid-nineteenth century social criticism of the Scottish Church was marked by "prophetic failure and social conformity", identifies Brewster as "the unique exception" to this judgment.¹² An examination of Brewster's work will raise the question of whether a combination of

¹¹ AITON, J., 1859, *A Tribute to the Memory of the Poor Man's Champion*, Paisley, p 15

¹² SMITH, D.C., 1987, *Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest*, New York, p 175 (*Passive Obedience*)

his personal intransigence and lack of political judgment, and his inability to work with others in using his pastoral experience along with local political pressure to improve social conditions, did not significantly detract from the undoubted significance of his prophetic preaching. His sermons have considerable significance in that they frequently ally the Gospel and the Church to the struggle of the poor in a class war, and recognise that the structural causes of poverty were more important than individual moral failure. The sort of language he used, however, raises the likelihood that Brewster's sermons were designed more to shock and offend than to convince and persuade, and they reflect his strongly held political convictions more than profound theological insight.

Robert Burns was minister first of St George's and then of Free St George's from 1811 until he left to be minister of Knox Church Toronto and then Professor of Christian Evidences and Church History in Knox College. Unlike Brewster, he was a great admirer of Chalmers. Burns' published work indicates a concern for social justice and the improvement of social conditions which was as seriously, though not as controversially held as Brewster's. His determination to research evidence and publish balanced conclusions contrasts with Brewster's approach, as does his willingness to allow that evidence to alter his opinions. Donald Smith's relegation of Burns' social criticism to three short footnotes does not do justice to his contribution in the field. Burns' regular public disagreements with Brewster may have led to the assumption that he was indifferent to social conditions, and to an underestimation of his work in comparison to Brewster's public career.

Although expressing, in their different ways, concern for the poor and for social justice, both Burns and Brewster shared a common belief that a system of parochial poor relief based on a territorial ministry was the best way to tackle the serious problem of widespread poverty raised by the collapse of Paisley's economy. They also shared a conviction that the Church was not only the ideal provider of social welfare but the ideal agent to promote necessary social change. Both of these assumptions were highly questionable.

They were shared, however, by Robert Buchanan and Norman MacLeod. Robert Buchanan was inducted in 1833 to the Tron Parish in Glasgow, where Thomas Chalmers had been minister, after pastorates in Gargunnock and Saltoun. He joined the Free Church in 1843 and was to write the history of the *Ten Year's Conflict*¹³ from the Free Church perspective. He was also the dynamic convener of the Free Church's Sustentation Fund and Moderator of its General Assembly in 1860, by which time he had moved from Tron Free Church to Free College Church, where he remained until his death in 1875. Buchanan is often characterised, and perhaps caricatured, as representing the typical Free Church response to poverty and deprivation which assumed that they would be eradicated through evangelism and education, and he was certainly committed to both. But an account of his speeches, particularly in the early 1850s, and of the work he undertook in the Tron area will show that underlying the practical concern for Church extension and the provision of schools there was a commitment to social welfare and improvement which should not be lightly dismissed. Donald Smith quotes Buchanan, speaking in the General Assembly of 1851, in support of his (Smith's) contention that the Church appealed to the wealthy

¹³ BUCHANAN, R., 1876, *The Ten Year's Conflict*, London 2 Vols

classes on the basis of their self interest, but Buchanan will be shown to be far more critical of the emerging middle classes. He was very critical of their complacency in the face of the squalor he had encountered in the Wynds of the old city centre.

Norman Macleod came to the Barony Parish in Glasgow with a considerable ecclesiastical pedigree and a reputation as a preacher and writer. His ministry in the Barony, and his reflections on it in the magazine, *Good Words*, which he edited from 1860 until his death in 1872 has led one social historian to describe Macleod as providing “a new social theology”.¹⁴ Although Macleod possessed a very strong social conscience, his reforming reputation depends on his opposition, for example, to sabbatarianism and on the administrative organisation of his congregation which he undertook. There is little evidence to be found in his published work to suggest an innovative theological approach to poverty. His life-long Tory sympathies led his social vision to amount to little more than a kinder, more tolerant reflection of the divisions which existed in society.

Although Brewster was a stern critic of Thomas Chalmers’ political and economic thinking, he was, along with Burns, Buchanan and Macleod an uncritical supporter of the parochial system and territorial ministry which Chalmers had pioneered in Glasgow. All four accepted the assumption on which Chalmers’ parochial reforms were based, that it was in and through the work of the Church that society would be reformed, and it would be through involvement in the Church’s life and acceptance of Christian faith that those living in poverty would be helped either to overcome it or to avoid its worst effects. However the Church at the time had at its disposal no other

¹⁴ HILLIS, P., *Towards a new social theology; the contribution of Norman Macleod*, Records of the Scottish Church History Society, 1992 pp 263-285

model to enable it to envisage social reform, and there was a fear among Churchmen that if the Church was not at the centre of any social progress, it would find itself marginalised.

Patrick Brewster

There were three aspects to Brewster's involvement with the urban crisis in Paisley: the sermons he preached in which social conditions and the issues surrounding poverty were frequently addressed¹⁵, his active involvement in the Chartist movement, and his pastoral work with the poor of the Abbey Parish

Brewster's Sermons and Writings

Three political themes emerge from the sermons, particularly those which led to Brewster facing a libel in the Presbytery and General Assembly. A decade before Marx and Engels produced *The Communist Manifesto*, Brewster interpreted his country's history and its economic condition in terms of a class struggle. He describes the aristocracy as having taken away land which rightly belonged to the people, and having used the hereditary principle to deny to all what they gave to their descendants.¹⁶ Proprietors have claimed an exclusive possession of the land to which they were not entitled, and driven away those who worked it. The rights which the law gave to proprietors would not have been questioned had the proprietors not used their influence to create a legalised monopoly through the Corn Laws.¹⁷ All wealth is

¹⁵ BREWSTER, P., 1842, *The Seven Chartist and Military Discourses Ordered by the General Assembly to be Libelled by the Presbytery of Paisley*, Paisley. Quotations cited are from an edition published and introduced by the Editor of *Forward* and later Secretary of State for Scotland, Thomas Johnston. (JOHNSTON; T., *The Rev Patrick Brewster, His Chartist and Socialist Sermons*, Glasgow) (*Discourses*)

¹⁶ *Discourses* p 16

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 75,76

the product of man's labour and those who create the wealth have a right to expect that it will be used to provide for their subsistence. The owners of industry, however, use the profits for themselves.¹⁸ Mechanisation has increased production forty times over, which ought to result in cheaper food and clothing for those involved in production, but in fact it has led to workers having to accept lower wages, the equivalent of the slave-owners whip.¹⁹ In exactly the same way, landed proprietors have taken the profits of agricultural improvements and passed none of the benefits on to labourers.²⁰ Brewster foresees an inevitable conflict between freedom and oppression²¹ which will be violent unless "the right-minded among us who sympathise with the people, will come fearlessly forward and stand on the right side".²²

Brewster ultimately derives his understanding of the class struggle from his theology.

God has filled the earth with his goodness, he has blessed our nation.....
with an abundant supply of food for man. He has destined it for the use
of all. But his bounty is intercepted and turned aside by
counteracting agencies, and they, by whose toil, with the blessing of
God, it has been produced, have received the smallest share of it, and
many of them hardly any share at all; and many more – not the idle
but the industrious, not the wasteful and profligate, but the careful and
thrifty – not refusing to labour, but vainly supplicating for leave to toil,
are thus deprived of the bounty of heaven by the intervention and
operation of unequal laws, which take the bread out of the mouth of

¹⁸ Ibid., p 37, 50

¹⁹ Ibid. p 32

²⁰ Ibid., p 57

²¹ Ibid., p 18

²² Ibid., p 56

famishing industry, and transfer it back into the hands of wasteful idleness and thankless profligacy – laws by means of which, the people are stripped of their rights and robbed of their property, and deprived of their liberty, and as effectually reduced to servitude and crushed under the yoke of a Master Class, as if they were actually the property of that class, and were subjected to the will of individual owners.²³

The “unequal laws” were the Corn Laws, and Brewster’s condemnation of them is the second political theme to Ewhich emerges from his sermons. The Corn Laws rob the poor of a third of their earnings and give it to rapacious landlords.²⁴ Frequently in his sermons, both to the chartists and to the military, Brewster spells out his view of the operation of the Corn Laws: that when production exceeded the demand of home consumption, premiums at home and trade barriers abroad led to both unemployment and higher prices.²⁵ The Corn Laws’

most offensive and revolting feature is its pressure on the poor man, in proportion to his poverty, and its exemption of the rich man in the ratio of his wealth. The perfection of just and equitable taxation is to make the subject pay in proportion to his means. But the operation of this unrighteous law is the reverse of that honest principle – taking the most, in proportion, from the poorest and most helpless, and the least in proportion from the wealthiest and most powerful.....Many of the most rare and luxurious kinds of food are not taxed, but are received into the country without any duty, because within the reach only of the wealthy and favoured class, and not likely, under any circumstances,

²³ Ibid., p 31

²⁴ Ibid., p 62

²⁵ *Eg* Ibid., pp 31, 32, 76, 77

to become the food of the people; and therefore not likely to come into collision with the landholder's interests, in keeping up the price of their own produce.²⁶

The third area of political controversy which Brewster's sermons frequently addressed was the operation of the Poor Law. Brewster was born and brought up in Jedburgh, where his father was a schoolmaster, from whom, he said he "inherited" his radical opinions, love of freedom and hatred of oppression.²⁷ In most areas of Scotland, provision for the poor was made by means of voluntary collections and resources provided by Heritors and Kirk Sessions. Parishes in the Borders frequently adopted a policy of imposing legal assessments on Heritors. Brewster was a strong supporter of making assessments on Heritors and Kirk Sessions legally enforceable. This put him at odds with the view expressed by a General Assembly Committee which gave evidence to a parliamentary Commission of Enquiry that assessment should be free of legal compulsion, and also brought him into conflict with Church and civil authorities.

Brewster says that the legal provision for poor relief is "the property of the poor man".²⁸ He accepts the case put forward by William Allison for the superiority of "a fixed and legal over a voluntary and uncertain provision for the poor"²⁹ At a meeting of Paisley Presbytery on 4 May 1842, Brewster persuaded the Presbytery unanimously to approve an overture to the General Assembly, supporting legal assessments.³⁰ One of the arguments used against legal assessments was that it would

²⁶ Ibid., p 78

²⁷ *Report of a Soiree in Honour of the Rev Patrick Brewster, November 12, (Paisley, 1838)*

²⁸ *Discourses* p 44

²⁹ Ibid., p 42

³⁰ Press cutting in Brewster's uncatalogued scrapbook kept in Paisley Abbey. The pages in the scrapbook are not numbered. (*Brewster's Scrapbook*)

be encourage indolence. Brewster argues that if this were the case, then those countries which provided for the poor through legal assessments would be expected to show the highest levels of poverty and immorality, but, he claims, Ireland with no fixed levels of poor relief is considerably less prosperous than England, which does.³¹ Brewster fears that the failure to provide legally enforceable assessments could, in turn, undermine the rule of law itself, because the evasion of voluntary contributions brings the law into contempt.³² He does not accept the widely held view that poor relief was intended to be given only occasionally, and to those who were physically unable to work. He maintains it was intended to assist any who are unemployed otherwise the law which prohibited begging would clearly be evidence of a flagrantly callous legislature.³³ By refusing a man the right to beg, the law deprives a man of the right to ask relief from a fellow human being³⁴ Brewster caustically points out to his congregation “Year after year have we invited your attention to this subject. Year after year have we demanded justice to the poor, but we had not the voice of the charmer in our appeals; for we could only tell you of the claims of humanity, the rights of justice, the command of God. But you will now listen to us, when we can add to these the more powerful motives of self security, and self interest”.³⁵

Brewster’s invocation of God was more than rhetorical. His political convictions stemmed from three significant theological convictions which his sermons contain. First, Brewster’s demand that the Church take seriously the condition of the poor was based on a conviction which has a remarkably contemporary reference: that God is on the side of the poor. In the first of the Chartist Sermons, Brewster says, “The Son of

³¹ *Discourses*, p 40

³² *Ibid.*, p 44

³³ *Ibid.*, p 34

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p 35

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p 47

God came, especially, to the poor. He came to preach the Gospel to the poor. He came emphatically – literally as well as figuratively, temporally as well as spiritually – to ‘loose the bands of wickedness and to undo heavy burdens’. And the whole of his life on earth corresponds with this character, and the whole of his blessed Gospel tends to this effect”.³⁶ It is this which has led William Storrar to write that behind Brewster’s political views there was a developed incarnational theology.³⁷ Certainly Brewster’s theology was incarnational, but it can hardly be described as “developed”. The passage quoted is the only one in Brewster’s published sermons which deals with the essence of the incarnation. His early sermons imply an incarnational theology but are more concerned about the consequences of the Incarnation for the Christian life in the secular world, and how it informs Brewster’s growing interest in Chartism. Jesus’ humility and condescension is the approach of a spiritual guide and teacher, so “when Christians would imitate the humility of their great pattern, they will be bowed to the dust for their unworthiness before God....but in their intercourse with the world they will not be required to abase themselves before the proud and the worthless”.³⁸ In other early works, Brewster describes the humility of Jesus but does not describe it as incarnational but rather sees as exemplary, and strategic. Brewster argues that had Jesus criticised government he and his disciples would either have been destroyed, or would have provoked a demonstration of divine power, which would have been inconsistent with God’s decision to convert the nations by “the feeblest and most unlikely instruments”.³⁹ It would therefore be more accurate to describe Brewster as having a strong incarnational conviction, whose implications developed

³⁶ Ibid., p 5

³⁷ STORRAR W, 1990, *Scottish Identity*, Edinburgh, p108

³⁸ BREWSTER, P., 1833, *Heroism of the Christian Spirit*, Paisley, pp 18-19 (*Heroism*)

³⁹ BREWSTER, P., 1836, *An Essay on Passive Obedience*, Paisley p 15 (*Essay*)

considerably from the days of his early works, than to say that he had a developed incarnational theology.

It is from his incarnational conviction that Brewster derives his second fundamental belief, that Christian faith and ministry are to be expressed politically. There are no grounds, he says, for assuming that the biblical understanding of oppression and deliverance is spiritual.⁴⁰ The prophets are cited to show that political involvement is part of the profession of religion.⁴¹ Thomas Chalmers is criticised for saying on his 1838 Church Extension tour that politics should be left “to the potsherds of the earth”.⁴² Brewster shrewdly observes that when a preacher commends obedience to rulers, that is not considered to be political but if he raises the question of rulers’ obligations to their subjects that is considered politics.⁴³ In an open letter to Chalmers, published in *The Glasgow Chronicle*, and dated October 3 1838, Brewster accuses Chalmers of being more interested in stressing the duties of the governed than in pointing out the obligations of those who govern, and claims that had John Knox adhered to Chalmers’ maxim about the potsherds of the earth, there would have been no reformation.⁴⁴ Those who imagine they are teaching religion without politics are actually encouraging acceptance of what Chalmers was later to call “the existing order of things”.⁴⁵

Brewster, thirdly, views the Church as an institution which has amongst its primary functions the protection of the poor and the weak against the rich and the powerful.

⁴⁰ *Discourses* p 1

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p 9

⁴² *Ibid.*, p 26

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp 6,7

⁴⁴ The letter is preserved in Patrick Brewster’s scrapbook. A note written by Brewster indicates the letter also appeared in the *Edinburgh Mercury*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p 28

From his earliest published works Brewster analysed the Church's history in terms of what he saw as its support for the poor and its aligning itself with the rich, and for freedom from oppression.

In a sermon published in 1835,⁴⁶ Brewster introduces a theme which he is frequently to return to: that Israel, God's chosen people proved unworthy, and so had to be replaced by the Christian Church, which, in its Roman form also proved itself unworthy and so there had to be a reformation. And though the Church of Scotland has not always been "blameless.....it is to her and her alone, we owe the assertion of those grand fundamental principles of liberty, religious and civil, which, by the blessing of Heaven, have at length wrought out our deliverance – we trust for ever – from spiritual and temporal oppression".⁴⁷

In his *Essay in Passive Obedience*, Brewster again asserts that the Gospel, properly understood, undermines civil and religious bondage. He criticises the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church not only for being "corrupters of revealed truth" but also for becoming "the basest and most successful tools of political and spiritual oppression", while the reformation is praised for securing "the inestimable blessings of civil and religious liberty".⁴⁸ So even in his less contentious period, Brewster's view of the Church stressed its duty to support the rights of the weak and resist the encroaching on these rights by either the rich or those with political power. It is an ecclesiology based on function rather than doctrine. By the time he comes to preach the sort of sermons which resulted in him being libelled, this approach to the Church

⁴⁶ BREWSTER, P., 1835, *The Claims of the Church of Scotland on the Support and Affection of the People*, Paisley, p 16,17 (*Claims of the Church*)

⁴⁷ BREWSTER, *Essay*, pp 16,17

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p 26

has become much more strident. He describes the Church as having frequently become an engine of the state⁴⁹ or a tool of the state,⁵⁰ and when that has happened and the priesthood has supported those in power, the doctrine of the Church and the faith of the people has been shaped not by the Gospel but by political considerations.⁵¹ There is no mystery about the Church and the Christian's practical duty.⁵² It is to seek deliverance for the oppressed.⁵³ Brewster considers that although it is socially acceptable to belong to the Church few take seriously the Church's duty to relieve the oppressed and the destitute,⁵⁴ He attributes this to the fact that "in the great towns especially, a large proportion of the Established and Dissenting Churches are mainly occupied by the middle or wealthier ranks of society."⁵⁵ These, with their teachers make an outwardly and regularly decent profession of Christianity....It is an important question for our consideration whether the men who now fill our Churches are helping to deliver the poor and needy, and to break in pieces the oppressor".⁵⁶

It would be wrong to imply that Brewster defines the Church only in terms of its commitment to social justice. In an early sermon he takes considerable time to stress the nature of the Church as a worshipping community, and the duty of each person to attend worship. Those who do not are called to "humiliation and penitence". But, typically, Brewster goes on to balance that judgment with implied criticism of those who have not included provision for the poor.⁵⁷ A corollary of Brewster's view that

⁴⁹ *Discourses* p 2

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p 81

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp 3,4

⁵² *Ibid.*, p 66

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p 51

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p 64

⁵⁵ A suspicion which has been confirmed by contemporary research. See HILLIS, P., 1981. "Presbyterianism and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Glasgow: a Study of Nine Churches". *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 32, pp 47 - 64

⁵⁶ *Discourses*, pp 52-53

⁵⁷ BREWSTER, *Claims of the Church* pp25-6

the Church is an institution committed to social and economic justice is his understanding that a person is not obliged to be content with his lot nor to accept it as the will of God. Again his early works hint at what was later to be developed. Brewster rejects the conclusion drawn from the humility of Jesus that following him involves submission to oppression. Before Mrs Alexander wrote in 1848 about “the rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate”, Brewster was condemning the belief that God had established the orders of society.⁵⁸ In his *Essay on Passive Obedience*, in answer to those who claim that obedience to all authority, irrespective of the way it is exercised, is implied by the Pauline statement that “the powers that be are ordained of God”, Brewster says that this rests on a false understanding of Providence, which assumes that God’s permission of tyranny to exist implied approval of it.⁵⁹ Thus Brewster argues that no one is obliged to be content with an oppressed lot.

Brewster’s refusal to accept that people should be content with their conditions is most vividly expressed in his Military Sermons. It is not the will of God that someone should be content with poverty. The poor are not required to accept their poverty any more than the rich are required to risk the perils inherent in wealth.⁶⁰ In what Brewster says about resistance to oppressive regimes, where there is no means of legitimate redress, the implication is clear that the oppressed are not obliged to accept their oppression.⁶¹ Although human sinfulness results in unavoidable suffering to which people must be resigned, there is suffering which is caused in defiance of God’s will⁶² such as famine caused by bad government in India or the destruction of agriculture and manufacture by unjust wars in Afghanistan and China.

⁵⁸ BREWSTER, *Heroism*, p 13

⁵⁹ Brewster, *Essay*, pp 21,22

⁶⁰ *Discourses* p 73,74

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p 20

⁶² *Ibid.*, p 69

Resignation in the face of injustice is not expected of the Christian, and Brewster urges against being misled by exhortations to resignation in such cases. “Be resigned, indeed to whatever you may regard as the will of God. But beware of being cheated into a base and sinful submission to human tyranny, when it is your commanded duty to claim the redress of your own and your brother’s wrongs”.⁶³ Similarly it is not the will of God that people in this country, suffering under iniquitous legislation, should continue to suffer without redress.⁶⁴

Brewster’s Involvement with Chartism

In 1838, Scotland was not only the focus for its own growing Chartist activity, but it attracted the attention of Chartists south of the border. The Birmingham Political Union planned a “holy and peaceful pilgrimage” round the country, beginning in Scotland, to rally support for a petition embodying the Chartist principles of universal manhood suffrage, vote by ballot, annual parliaments, payment for MPs, equal electoral districts and the abolition of the property qualification for members of parliament.⁶⁵ Signatures were to be obtained at great rallies. When the petition had been sent to parliament there was to be a day of protest when supporters would be asked to boycott taxes and excisable goods. It was envisaged that the pilgrimage should start in Glasgow”. The Glasgow reformers approved the Birmingham plan and Thomas Attwood, the Birmingham radical, was invited to what was anticipated would be a demonstration of Chartist strength on Glasgow Green on 21 May 1838.

⁶³ Ibid., p 71

⁶⁴ Ibid., p 72

⁶⁵ As this grand pilgrimage was being planned, the Court of Session decision in the Auchterarder case was announced. It is interesting to note that in central Scotland the number who left the Church of Scotland at the Disruption was significantly greater where there had been Chartist activity and Chartist Churches. See McKAY J.R., 1969, “The Disruption: An examination of some statistics”, *The Philosophical Journal*, Vol 6 No 2,

In his acceptance Attwood made clear his commitment to moral force as the means of achieving Chartist aims.

Despite atrocious weather on 21 May the huge demonstration took place⁶⁶, and by June 1838 the national petition had been adopted in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Perth, Dunfermline, and at county meetings in Renfrewshire, Ayrshire and Fife. But by later in the summer tension had grown between advocates of moral force such as Thomas Attwood and the supporters of physical force, particularly Feargus O'Connor and the Scottish radical leader Dr John Taylor who toured the west of Scotland advocating their cause. When, in October preparations were being made to elect delegates to a "General Convention of the Industrious Classes", Dr John Taylor warned people to elect only those prepared "to risk everything, even life itself".

The moment had come for Brewster to intervene. In November 1838 in "Mr Braid's Church", Patrick Brewster addressed the Renfrewshire Political Union in support of moral force, and in the same month the Union held a soiree in Brewster's honour.⁶⁷ A repeated refrain in all the speeches praising Brewster at the soiree is the surprise that a Church of Scotland minister should side with the reformers. As the opening speaker, John Galt put it "It is highly encouraging to find a minister of the Church of Scotland, possessed of such splendid talents as those with which you are endowed, generously coming forward to aid the friends of freedom in their honourable and patriotic enterprise, connected with a Church whose ministers in general, have

⁶⁶ A crowd, estimated at 30,000 to 100,000 by the Whig and Tory press, and 200,000 by the radical press, attended the rally. 70 Trade Unions took part in a two mile procession to Glasgow Green and there were 43 bands involved. All public works were at a standstill. WILSON, A., 1970, *The Chartist Movement in Scotland*, Manchester, p 50 (*Chartist Movement*)

⁶⁷ *Report of a Soiree in honour of the Rev Patrick Brewster, one of the ministers of the Abbey Church, Paisley, for his exertions in the cause of freedom*, (Paisley, 1838) p 3

uniformly, in violation of those holy principles which they profess to each, leagued themselves with the people's oppressors, and aided and abetted them in their iniquitous attacks on upon the liberties of mankind".

Alexander Wilson⁶⁸ says of Brewster's open commitment to the reformers' cause: "The accession of this clergyman was considered the most important event since the visit of Thomas Attwood". Undoubtedly Brewster saw himself occupying a leading place in the movement for reform, and along with Abram Duncan, a pirn maker, and John Fraser, a former schoolmaster he formed the leadership of those who opposed what they saw as the dangerous appeal to violence of the physical force Chartists, led by Fergus O'Connor, Chartism's most influential leader and MP for County Cork.

On December 5 1838, a conference of Scottish local Political Associations was held in Edinburgh and that evening Brewster chaired a public meeting on Calton Hill which adopted resolutions supporting moral force over physical violence. Brewster immediately published a personal Address to the Chartists which secretaries of local associations were asked to read at the first meeting thereafter: clear evidence that Brewster saw himself as the leading Chartist in Scotland. The *Ayrshire Examiner*, a Chartist newspaper, hailed "the accession of Mr Brewster to be an active agent in the cause as another good man".⁶⁹ It is open to question, however, whether Brewster's active involvement with the Chartist movement was an unqualified blessing. The resolutions which Brewster steered through at Calton Hill forced Fergus O'Connor to come to Scotland on a rhetorical tour, and both men used language which has been

⁶⁸ WILSON, *Chartist Movement* p 60

⁶⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, ., p 63

described as “virulent”⁷⁰ though O’Connor’s language was more in keeping with his demands for physical force than was Brewster’s in support of moral force.. “Listen now, my friends,” Brewster says, “to the insolent contempt with which your enemies are assailing you. Hear the paeans they are chanting over the discomfiture and humiliation of the poor Physicals.....The folly of those who have forced themselves into the front of the Radical movement has been long apparent to the great bulk of the people.....You must either convert the misleaders of the movement by a determined expression of opinion and an unequivocal avowal of principle, or you must get rid of them by the formation of new unions”.⁷¹ Brewster’s support for the establishment of new, rival unions, further divided the Chartist movement. His language drove moderate Chartists away from the moral force cause, which, of course, had a great deal politically as well as ethically to commend it. The Chartists were in no position to match the military strength at the government’s disposal, which Brewster and Paisley had witnessed in 1819.

Brewster was someone who was unable to make the compromises necessary in politics. At a time when there were suggestions that Chartists might make common cause with others who supported some of their aims, Brewster wrote a second Address to the Radicals of Scotland, refusing to countenance combining with any other movement.

I have opinions of my own, which I will neither will neither alter
nor modify.....I wish success to the Corn-law agitation, because I desire
to get possession of the provision wagons and to see the people better fed.
But I will not join the promoters of that agitation, much as I respect many

⁷⁰ WRIGHT L.C. , 1953, *Scottish Chartism*, p 52

⁷¹ Patrick Brewster’s scrapbook

of them. Nor would I join a Household Suffrage agitation with Lord Durham; nor a five pound suffrage agitation with Lord Brougham; nor the greatest possible suffrage agitation with Mr O'Connell. I will not consent to stop the Radical movement one hour, for any of these claims, urgent as they may be. I will not descend from our high position, which commands the whole territory of reform, into any of the quagmires of Whiggery, lest we should there stick fast, till our enemies had bound us with new chains. I will demand the People's Charter and nothing less".⁷²

It is likely that Brewster's demand for the People's Charter and nothing less owed more to his stubborn determination always to have his own way than to a conviction that only the full demands of the Charter would stem potential agitation for revolution.

By the time Brewster wrote that second open letter, his influence had begun to wane, largely because his temperament aroused opposition. A convention of radical associations and political unions was planned for early 1839. Each county could elect a representative. Brewster persuaded the Renfrewshire Political Union yet again to adopt moral force resolutions, and, although the first choice to oppose the militant Dr John Taylor as the county's representative to the convention was Bailie John Henderson, the Editor of the *Glasgow Saturday Post* and *Paisley and Renfrewshire Reformer*, Brewster succeeded in having himself substituted for Henderson, with whom he was later to clash over assessments for poor relief when Henderson was Provost of Paisley. The election of the Renfrewshire representative was held on a

⁷² February 1st 1839, *Brewster's Scrapbook*

stormy January 1 1839. Brewster failed to carry his moral force resolution, lost his temper and angrily left the rally with his supporters. The following day a meeting at Glasgow Green took great pleasure at Brewster's defeat. Brewster responded by writing the second Address to the radicals of Scotland referred to above, demanding that a meeting of delegates of every association in Scotland should be held in Edinburgh to reassert Scotland's commitment to moral force. "The eyes of the men of England may yet be opened in time to see the delusion which has been practised upon them". Brewster rebuts allegations made by Fergus O'Connor that he had been in communication with the Whigs and Daniel O'Connell who had suggested diluting the demand for universal suffrage by proposing a household suffrage. He rejects the charge of pacifism which had been made against him, saying that he had always supported the right to self-defence. He points out that even the more cautious supporters of moral force have spoken of resorting to arms, admittedly as a last resort, while claiming that the leading proponent of physical force, Stephens, had shown that he believed that time had come by saying that all available means of promoting reform short of armed force had already been exhausted. Support for physical force, says Brewster, can only be interpreted as a conspiracy to take what the Legislature had refused to give. "It is quite evident that the most guarded language of the physical force party, stripped of the sophistry which surrounds it, just amounts to this, that they may commence an armed attack upon the government, whenever they themselves shall be pleased to decide that they have exhausted all other means - that is, that they may do so next year, next month, next week, tomorrow, if it shall so please them".⁷³

⁷³ *Brewster's Scrapbook*

Brewster continued to address meetings where attendances were poor while O'Connor who had expressed his intention of "dealing with Brewster" spoke to huge rallies. Brewster was reduced to asking for public debates with O'Connor which O'Connor declined. He knew he had won. Alexander Wilson comments "A few more soirees were yet to be given in (Brewster's) honour, but his spell was broken and there was an increasing tendency to discount him as an uncompromising priest who drew £300 a year from the Church of whose principles he disapproved but was ready to sacrifice the unity of the movement for the sake of his dogmatism".⁷⁴

Donald Smith points out that Brewster was the only minister of the Church to give support to the Chartist movement,⁷⁵ and of course that gives substance to Brewster's radical reputation. However, the lack of political judgment which Brewster showed, his obsessive concern with his own position, the impression he gave of dogmatic infallibility all raise the question of whether Brewster's involvement achieved much more than personal gratification. It certainly bears out the judgment of his obituarist, that "the pertinacity with which he embraced the most extreme views on public questions, and the stubbornness with which he maintained his own particular crotchets materially diminished the influence which he might have commanded, not merely in his own immediate neighbourhood but throughout the Kingdom".⁷⁶

Brewster's parochial work

Brewster's pastoral involvement with the poor of the Abbey Parish provides a third area in which his concern for the poor found expression. There is no doubt that Brewster had a deep concern for the conditions in which the poor lived, and was

⁷⁴ WILSON, *Chartist Movement* p 67

⁷⁵ SMITH, *Passive Obedience*, p 153n

⁷⁶ *The Glasgow Herald* 28 March 1859

completely convinced that only legally enforceable assessments on the Heritors would ensure adequate provision for them. Reports in the *Renfrewshire Advertiser* of meetings of the Kirk Session's Committee on Poor Relief⁷⁷ as well as the evidence of the cases he cites in sermons and speeches, show him to be well aware of the squalor in his parish. Brewster lost no opportunity to attempt to provide evidence to support his frequently expressed conviction that those who were liable for providing for the poor were attempting to avoid their responsibility.

Two public controversies in which he became involved illustrate how Brewster lost support for a good case and cause by allowing reasonable criticisms of what he encountered to be undermined by his extravagant language, personal abuse and habitual intolerance.

Tension between the Heritors of the Abbey parish became a recurring issue and first arose, perhaps significantly, when Brewster's direct involvement with Chartism began to decline. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that Brewster publicised particular cases in the Abbey parish which he believed illustrated a neglect of the poor, only after he no longer had access to Chartism's public campaign. On 31 December 1839, the Abbey Kirk Session⁷⁸ received a petition from the unemployed, complaining that the overseers of poor relief had refused to pay the sum awarded by a recent meeting of the Heritors and Kirk Session. Brewster and an elder were appointed a committee of inquiry to discover how to obtain the necessary relief. Six months later the attention of the Kirk Session was again drawn to the alleged failure of the Overseers and the Superintendent of Poor Relief to meet cases of extreme destitution, and again a

⁷⁷ *Renfrewshire Advertiser*, 24 July 1847, 31 July 1847

⁷⁸ Paisley Abbey Kirk Session Weekday Minute Book, 1829-53, National Archive of Scotland CH2/490/51

committee of inquiry was appointed.⁷⁹ On 18 May, the Kirk Session recorded that “there does appear to have been neglect, as well as want of sympathy, on the part of the Overseers of the district,” though it did not attach any blame to the Superintendent of Poor Relief, Walter Millar. Millar, in addition to being Superintendent of Poor Relief, was a member of the Kirk Session of Paisley Abbey. The following month, on 13 June, a petition was received by the Abbey Kirk Session “from twenty four heads of families in a state of great destitution”. The Kirk Session agreed to call a meeting of the Managers of Poor Relief to consider making an allowance to the families of the destitute unemployed of two shillings per week for each child under fourteen, to consider the level of relief generally. The Kirk Session also decided to ask for a meeting of the Heritors and Kirk Session to dispose of the petition. Kirk Session meetings on 13, 16 and 20 June all recorded complaints that the Heritors had not agreed to a meeting, and on 20 June a deputation was appointed to ask Robert Macnair, minister of the first charge, to intimate a meeting of Heritors and Kirk Session from the pulpit. All of these meetings were chaired by Brewster. On 19 October 1840, at a Kirk Session meeting chaired by Macnair, Brewster, while calling the Kirk Session’s attention to alleged cases of neglect of the poor at considerable length, drew attention to a letter, written by Walter Millar and published in the *Paisley Advertiser*.⁸⁰ Brewster alleged that this letter accused him of “spite and malignity towards Mr Macnair and his family”. Millar’s letter referred to a speech of Brewster’s, critical of Millar, in the Presbytery of Paisley, where Millar was not able to defend himself. Millar therefore resorted to writing a public letter to Brewster which he sent to the local paper. “I believe”, he wrote, “if the public knew of the difficult and delicate and troublesome nature of my duties....there are few who would

⁷⁹ Ibid., 11 May 1840.

⁸⁰ *Paisley Advertiser*, 17 October 1840

“speak of me as scornfully and treat me so contemptuously as my own minister”. There is no doubt that, despite his denials of “spite and malignity”, Brewster demonstrated considerable hostility to his colleague Macnair after the Heritors had agreed to Macnair’s request for a new manse, shortly after his induction in 1824. They had refused a similar request from Brewster when he was offered presentation to the first charge of Paisley Abbey only a few months earlier. However once Macnair had been inducted, the Heritors reported to the Presbytery in May 1824 that “part of the manse of the Abbey Parish being much decayed, the Heritors had voluntarily come to the resolution of building a new manse”.⁸¹

Brewster clashed frequently with Macnair in public, accusing him in 1836 of allowing partiality to overcome his judgment, and including fallacies and misstatements in a pamphlet which Macnair had published about new Church buildings in Paisley, and in which he disagreed with Brewster about which areas of the town were most in need of a new church building. “It is curious”, Brewster wrote to the *Paisley Advertiser*, “to see how the fervour of a strong desire to accomplish a favourite design, finds food for its ingenuity in setting aside the plainest facts and most palpable conclusions”.⁸²

The Abbey Kirk Session minute of the 19 October 1840 records that there is “not the slightest ground” for the charges contained in Millar’s letter, and “part of the Session being of the opinion that Mr Millar should not remain a member of their body, a motion was made and carried that he be required to resign”. At Kirk Session meetings on 24 October, and again on 30 October Brewster and Macnair again

⁸¹ Minutes of the Presbytery of Paisley, 1823-36, CH2/294/14, 5 May 1824

⁸² Letter headed “Mr Macnair’s published speech”, *Brewster’s Scrapbook*

clashed on the issue.⁸³ Macnair proposed that the Presbytery of Paisley be asked to review proceedings in the case of Walter Millar. Brewster successfully moved that any reference to the Presbytery was unnecessary. On 2 November the Kirk Session of Paisley Abbey found Walter Millar guilty of “gross neglect” in the cases of two paupers.

Brewster then, rather typically, made public the disagreements between himself and the Abbey Kirk Session on the one hand, and the Heritors of the Abbey parish on the other in an open letter published on Christmas Day 1840.⁸⁴ In this letter Brewster refers to the Kirk Session’s decision on 2 November to find Superintendent Millar guilty of gross neglect. At a meeting of Heritors, Brewster maintains, Millar did not deny that in the case of an old widow, confined to bed for fourteen weeks, covered only by an old packsheets, with an incurable disease, with no fire nor light in the house even in January and looked after by a daughter who had sold everything she had before asking for parish aid, the assistance granted was a shilling a week for two months, which only paid the rent, and that for nine months no additional bedding was provided. “Neither was it denied” Brewster continues,

that the old woman was left alone to struggle with disease and want for a whole month by the negligence of the superintendent; and when his attendance was forcibly and touchingly drawn to her miserable condition by herself - her burning sores resting upon boards and straw, and with hardly as much aliment, after deducting rent and fire, as would give her a single meal in the week - he left her again without any help for other six days and shocked the public by the horrible spectacle, of a

⁸³ Paisley Abbey Kirk Session Weekday Minute Book, 1829-53, National Archive of Scotland CH2/490/51

⁸⁴ *Brewster’s Scrapbook*. The source of the press cutting of the open letter is not given.

human creature, in the last stage of a fatal disease, creeping across the street for aid to save her from the jaws of famine and to prolong her wretched existence a few weeks more.

Brewster adds that when the superintendent's negligence was reported to the Heritors, "as if rejoicing that they had got one that would save their money, even by such means, they immediately proceeded to pass a vote of confidence in him".

The treatment of this old woman clearly inspired some of Brewster's most powerful oratory, and when he refers to it in his fourth Chartist Sermon he is not unaware that when he adopts biblical language to condemn such cruelty - "Ye serpents - ye generation of vipers - How can ye escape the damnation of Hell". - he is using extreme language.

I make no apology, and, to those who best understand the subject, I need make none, for the language I have used, in speaking of the advocates, or the instruments, of the horrid system of injustice and fraud, which has caused so much misery among the poor and such disgrace to our country.....when you have seen the daughter driven from the bedside of her dying mother, and that mother left alone to struggle with disease and want, a spectacle which human heart could not contemplate without demanding instant relief, - so shattering, scathed and torn by a fierce disease, resting her burning sores on boards and straw - and yet, with a meekness, endurance and gratitude, even to the authors of her suffering, that would soften a heart of stone - when it is made clear to you that the men who have received your encouragement

and countenance have done all this and more than this - when such things as these are proved to be the result of your own supineness and negligence, in handing over the poor to be thus tortured to their last agonies – is it not wonderful that you should shrink from the heavy responsibility which you have incurred and should deprecate the language in which such conduct is, and ought to be denounced.⁸⁵

However accurate Brewster's criticism of Walter Millar was, Brewster himself was to be severely criticised by the Presbytery of Paisley the following year. The Presbytery expressed regret at the language used in the correspondence between a minister and an elder of the Church. Most of the Kirk Session meetings which dealt with Walter Millar had been chaired by Brewster, and the Presbytery reached the unanimous conclusion that the Abbey Kirk Session had erred in confusing its roles in the management of the poor and as a spiritual court; that Millar's responsibilities as Superintendent were not to the Kirk Session (but to the Kirk Session and Heritors) and should not have been reviewed by the Kirk Session alone but in a joint meeting with the Heritors. that the Session should not have voted that Millar should resign because there was no evidence to warrant that judgment, and had there been then proceedings should have been taken against Millar in terms of the law of the Church; and that the minutes referring to the case against Millar should be erased by the Presbytery Clerk.⁸⁶ It is a damning judgment on Brewster which he attributed to the Presbytery's constant opposition to anything he proposed. However, Brewster persuaded the Presbytery of Paisley to overture the General Assemblies of 1841 and 1842 on the subject of improving the provision of poor relief. The Presbytery, which

⁸⁵ BREWSTER, *Discourses*, p 59

⁸⁶ Minutes of the Presbytery of Paisley, 1836-1843, CH2/294/15

was severely critical of Brewster earlier in 1841, and the previous year had refused to elect Brewster a commissioner to the General Assembly, yet passed these overtures unanimously. This suggests that there was considerably more support for the principle of improved poor relief within the Church than sometimes Brewster implies, and that the vehemence of some of Brewster's language was indeed detrimental to his cause.

Brewster had another public, acrimonious disagreement with John Henderson, the Provost of Paisley. Brewster believed that a Court of Session judgment in a case in Ceres had given the poor an absolute right to support and that consequently Paisley Town Council was obliged to draw up a list of all those who required support. Brewster himself published a pamphlet containing the increasingly acrimonious letters he sent to the *Glasgow Post and Renfrewshire Reformer*, which Henderson edited. Brewster says that he was "desirous to avoid unnecessary personalities," yet in one of them he tells Henderson: "Small as is the opinion I have long held of your political integrity, I could hardly imagine even you capable of anything so utterly base and knavish – so wilfully – so disgustingly deceitful, as your misquotation and total perversion of the words of my letter".⁸⁷ In the same pamphlet, Brewster quotes a letter he sent to Walter Millar, which illustrates once more how he personalised issues.

Nerve yourself once more, Mr Walter. You have given me an opportunity of rebutting a very malignant statement which the parish harpies have for some time been very busy in propagating, namely that in taking the part of the poor I have been influenced solely by a

⁸⁷ BREWSTER, P., *The Legal Rights of the Poor of Scotland Vindicated*, Paisley, 1843, p 18

desire to punish the Heritors for not granting me an augmentation of stipend....every one connected with the business of the parish knows well, that for upwards of twenty years I have advocated the claims of the poor; demanding larger aliments for paupers, and exemption from assessment for the labouring classes; and in order to obtain my object, making a voluntary offer to pay the proportion of my own income, though exempted by law; which offer, however, was refused by the meeting under the absurd pretence that they would be obliged to assess other ministers.⁸⁸

Brewster goes on to argue that his renewed attendance at meetings with the Heritors to complain about poor relief was at precisely the time when he was seeking an augmentation of stipend.

At this very time, when most men might have stood aloof, I had been so successful at the meetings, both before and during that period, in obtaining an increase of allowance, that I was tainted with having greatly augmented the expenses of the parish. So far from being justly chargeable with a desire to punish the Heritors for giving me no augmentation of stipend, it is greatly more probably that they were influenced by motives of hostility to me, in most unjustly opposing that augmentation, since I only asked to be made equal with my colleague.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Ibid., p 14

⁸⁹ Ibid.

It would be wrong to deny that Patrick Brewster has an important place in the history of the history of the Church of Scotland and social development. As Stewart Mechie said, “one may hail him as a modern representative of a tradition.....which asserted the right of the Christian minister to comment on public affairs and apply the law of God as he learned it from Scripture to the laws of the land and custom in every sphere of the national life”.⁹⁰ It is to his credit that he was a powerful opponent of slavery and a strong supporter of Catholic emancipation, which, however, he did not extend to the freedom of his daughter to marry a Roman Catholic. His passionate concern for the poor is clear. However it is not as clear that he deserves the exclusive significance which Donald Smith has given him. His preaching, though powerful and popular, was not enhanced by the extreme language he often used or the personalised attacks in which he indulged. His social theology was expressed in slogans rather than thoughtfully developed. His effect on the administration of support for the poor was adversely affected by the controversies which he seemed to relish. His contribution to Chartism was not great, and, largely due to his arrogance, short-lived.

His career, however, illustrates how even someone as committed to social reform as Brewster was still could not see any alternative to support for the poor being administered through and within a territorial and parochial system. Although extremely critical of the Church he still regarded the Church as the only vehicle through whose structures the condition of the poor could be improved. His concern was always to extract more resources for the sustenance of the poor. He did not realise that the resources provided even by a legalised system of assessments, which he advocated, were insufficient to cope with the scale of poverty there was in the

⁹⁰ MECHIE, S., 1957, *The Church and Scottish Social Development*, 1957, p 118

Paisley of his day, nor did he recognise the need to look beyond the established system of poor relief in order to match resources to need.

Robert Burns

Robert Burns of St George's in Paisley was a friend and great admirer of Thomas Chalmers. He had been a minister in Paisley for seven years before Brewster was appointed to Paisley Abbey, and during the early years of Brewster's ministry there is little evidence that the two men had any contact. But almost as soon as Brewster's public profile was raised, the two men's public opposition began, yet Burns' public concern for the poor predates that of Brewster by almost twenty years. In 1835, Burns clashed with Brewster, who attended a public dinner in honour of a visit to Paisley by the Irish leader Daniel O'Connell. He initially disagreed profoundly with Brewster over the Abbey minister's political involvement, his belief that assessments for poor relief should be made legally enforceable, and over patronage which, until late in his life, Brewster unswervingly supported. The two men disagreed, sometimes very fiercely, at meetings of Paisley Presbytery. As we have seen Brewster's relationship with his Abbey colleague Robert Macnair was poor. Burns, however, was close to Macnair. The two men collaborated on producing the section on Paisley in the 1842 Statistical Account.

Burns on the Poor Law

In 1819 Robert Burns published a volume of *Dissertations* on a variety of aspects of the administration of poor relief, ranging from a discussion of the legislation on the subject to an analysis of the administration of poor relief in different areas of the country. The *Dissertations* also included Burns' own views on poor relief,

illustrations of poor relief on the continent, and detailed criticism of a report on poor relief submitted to both houses of parliament by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.⁹¹

The General Assembly of 1817 was asked for information about the administration of poor relief in Scotland by Lord Hardwicke, and William S Bourne, who chaired committees of the House of Lords and House of Commons examining provision for the poor. The Assembly appointed a committee to draw up an answer, One of the members was Thomas Kennedy of Dunure who had, since 1815, been undertaking an enquiry himself into poor relief in Scotland and in particular into whether assessments were likely to increase to what would be regarded as an oppressive level. Kennedy provided the committee with two hundred returns which he had received from parishes and districts. The committee, which was chaired by one of the leading Evangelical minister, Henry Moncrieff Wellwood, produced an Interim Report for the two Houses of Parliament in July 1817. This concluded that the Scots had based their poor relief system on the principle that individuals should fend for themselves, and that a parish is only bound to provide such of the necessities of life as a man cannot earn for himself. It defended the importance of distinguishing between regular poor and the industrious in need of occasional help. It was extremely critical of legal assessments, and in areas of expanding population, it supported the division of parishes and the erection of new ones so that a structure existed which allowed the system of voluntary contributions, administered by the Church, to continue.

⁹¹ BURNS, R., 1819, *Historical Dissertations on the Law and Practice of Great Britain and particularly of Scotland with regard to the Poor; on the Modes of Charity and the Means of Promoting the Improvement of the People, together with a Selection of Facts and Documents and Miscellaneous Inquiries illustrative of the Management of the Poor in Scotland and in Various Parts of the Continent of Europe*, Glasgow (Burns: *Dissertations*)

Following the production of this Interim Report a new, enlarged committee was instructed to draw up a questionnaire and, from the returns, produce a more comprehensive report. A questionnaire was issued to all parish ministers, and the Committee's final report was submitted to both houses of parliament, and copies of the report were sent to presbyteries following the General Assembly of May 1818. The report greatly disappointed Robert Burns. In his *Dissertations*, he maintains that the questions put to ministers were so imprecise that the answers to them could not sustain uniform compilation, that the returns made by ministers had not been accurately copied, that the arithmetic "in numberless instances" is incorrect, with the result that "the *foundation* of the whole is insecure, the premises in the argument are fallacious, and the conclusions must necessarily be inaccurate"⁹² Burns therefore produced his volume of *Dissertations* which he inscribes to William Bourne, the Chairman of the House of Commons Committee on the Poor Laws".My object in this work is, not so much to exhibit systematic views of my own, as to furnish some slender additions to the stock of materials on which the practical philosopher and economist may successfully operate. The larger our collection of well authenticated facts, the surer must be the foundation of our reasonings"⁹³.

Burns may have lacked Brewster's vivid oratorical style, and been unwilling to indulge in Brewster's fondness for personal abuse and involvement in partisan politics. The virtue of careful attention to detailed facts is, perhaps, a somewhat pedestrian trait when set alongside Brewster's gifts as a popular preacher, his political instincts, however flawed, as a moral force Chartist, his tendency to personalise all differences, political and theological, and his fondness for sweeping historical

⁹² BURNS, *Dissertations*, p 155

⁹³ Ibid., Inscription

generalisation. But Burns' commitment to the cause of the poor was as firm as Brewster's, though it was expressed with considerably less venom, and his painstaking work to argue for a clear poor relief policy should not be overlooked.

Just how painstaking that work was can be seen from his examination, in the *Dissertations*, of the General Assembly's final report on Poor Relief as it referred to Paisley.⁹⁴ For example, Burns quotes the General Assembly's Report showing the population as 19,937, according to the Parliamentary record of 1811. But he questions whether a census of 1811 can be used to assess the level of pauperism in 1817, and points out that a recent census in Paisley shows a population of 24,849, an increase of 20% since 1811, That figure referred only to the area of the royal burgh of Paisley and ignored both the expansion of the town beyond that and the Abbey parish beyond the boundaries of the town of Paisley. On Burns' estimation, the total population should be put closer to 45,000, a difference of 25,000. Clearly Burns has particular knowledge of Paisley, but he uses information from other towns and cities similarly to subject the returns for the parishes of the Barony, Gorbals and Govan in Glasgow, Ayr, Kirriemuir and Edinburgh. Burns concludes this analysis by proposing that there should be a new census of Scotland ordered by Parliament; that a new questionnaire should be drawn up, sent to the Moderators of all Kirk Sessions, and the results examined by the series of Church courts: Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly.

Six years after the publication of what became known as "Burns on the Poor Law", the young lawyer, Alexander Murray Dunlop, who later became a central figure in

⁹⁴ Ibid., p xx

the Evangelical Party, and who drew up the Claim of Right which preceded the Disruption, sent Burns a copy of a short work he had written on the same subject “in testimony of the respect I entertain for the learned author of the admirable dissertations”⁹⁵ As late as 1870, the Westminster Review carried an article “On the Scottish Poor Law”, and the writer says that “the principal works consulted in this part of our enquiry are ‘The Scottish Poor Laws’ by Scotus, Edinburgh 1870, and a work by the Rev. Robert Burns, ‘Historical Dissertations on the Law and Practice of Great Britain, and particularly of Scotland with regard to the Poor’”

Although Burns says in his Inscription to the M.P. William Bourne that his aim is not to express his own view, they do intrude. He introduces his quotation in full of the report of Moncrieff Wellwood’s Committee with the sentence “The report is inserted as follows without any comment, as there is hardly a sentiment in it with which I do not cordially agree”.⁹⁶

One of Burns’ Dissertations (IX) deals with voluntary private charity, which he applauds, but he maintains that private benevolence is often insufficient and indiscriminate. He writes that it is recommended and enforced by natural feelings and the nature of society. “So long as one man possesses greater endowments than another; and so long as human life is subject to endless casualties, so long must one part of society be dependent on another”.⁹⁷ And of course he believes that private charity is commended by scripture. But he insists that the poor cannot be left entirely to “the exertions of private benevolence”. Those who seek private charity are the

⁹⁵ Quoted in 1871 BURNS R.F., Toronto, *The Life and Times of the Rev R Burns, DD*, p 91 (*Life and Times*)

⁹⁶ BURNS, *Dissertations* p 150

⁹⁷ Ibid., p 189

most indolent, “the most worthless of the vile”. In the following Dissertation (XI) he says that Benevolent Associations are best equipped to deal with specific and identifiable needs, for example, assisting the blind, educating the deaf and dumb

Burns is unwilling to follow Chalmers in rejecting legislative support for the poor in principle. He argues that if a legislature may legitimately provide for the education and the religious education of a community there is no logical reason to object in principle to its providing for the relief of the poor. He recognises that assessments equalise the burden of supporting the poor, which is otherwise shouldered by regular attenders of the Church of Scotland and is avoided by those who do not attend. He concedes that assessments are necessary in large towns which lack sufficient accommodation in Churches for the population, or in rural areas where the rich stay for only a small part of the year, or where the gentry are irregular at worship or attached to the Episcopal Church. However, Burns believes assessments have inherently detrimental consequences. Legal assessments encourage dependence. Any system of compulsory beneficence tends to undermine the virtue of charity, although in Scotland that effect is minimised by the law enjoining a general duty to provide sufficient support for the poor, but leaving room for the principle of voluntary charity through the collections at the Church door. In this way the worst features of a compulsory system, which Burns sees in the English Poor Law, has been avoided in Scotland.. Legal assessments, Burns claims, discourage work and encourage reliance on charity, and although he believes the Scottish system attempts to avoid this, in the borders where, Burns says the “contagion” of the English system has spread, the discouragement of industry is clear. Finally, Burns believes, assessments make it extremely difficult to discriminate between poverty caused by circumstances beyond a person’s control and laziness or fecklessness.

In addition to these general criticisms of assessments, Burns makes a number of specific complaints about the practice of assessments as he has encountered it. He says that wherever assessments have been introduced, the effect has been a reduction in the amount of weekly collections, or, in some cases the abandonment of them. He quotes the General Assembly report: "The practice of weekly contributions at the Church tends to bless both those who give and those who receive the charity". Where assessments have been introduced there has been a tendency to elide what Burns believes is the important distinction between regular and occasional relief of poverty. Many who occasionally receive a few shillings help with the payment of rent, fuel or clothes are industrious people who should not be classed as paupers. Burns describes special collections taken at services in connection with the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper as being devoted specifically to those who require occasional assistance. Assessments, in Burns' experience, have undermined this practice. A third specific criticism of assessments Burns makes is that it undermines the role of the eldership and diminishes its authority and influence. Burns concludes "I have no doubt that the primitive mode of providing for the poor in Scotland, by means of voluntary collections and other resources at the charge of the members of Kirk Sessions, is by far the best, and ought in all cases to be adopted where necessity does not imperiously dictate a different plan".⁹⁸

In comparing the English system of poor relief with the Scottish, Burns points out that the English system obliges overseers of the poor to provide work for the unemployed. Burns insists that in Scotland, so long as a man is able to work, even if he cannot find any, he is excluded from the provisions of poor laws, even if no work

⁹⁸ Ibid., p 122

is available. “He may be in need from want of work, and he may obtain a little temporary relief; but he cannot be viewed as an ordinary recipient; and it is very questionable whether the existing law allows of an assessment being levied for the express benefit of such cases”⁹⁹

Burns' *Dissertations* on the Poor Law provide evidence of his real concern for the poor. His writing is clearly informed the debate which the developing urban crisis inspired among concerned Churchmen. The thoroughness of Burns' research, the strength of his arguments and the passion of his concern do not suggest any complacency about the problem of poverty. The style of his ministry in Paisley confirms that.

Burns' Paisley Ministry

According to the biography of him written by his son, Burns was “all the time in the streets and lanes of the town on missions of benevolence.....All the charitable institutions enjoyed his advocacy and felt his care. Connexion with their boards was to him no mere sinecure. He was chairman of emigration societies to facilitate the exodus of the deserving poor to those lands of promise which Britain's colonies supplied”.¹⁰⁰ There may be a hint of filial piety in the description of “long rows of poverty-stricken people reaching from his study desk out into the street, eager to pour into his ready ear the story of their woes” but Burns' commitment to the poor was confirmed by one of the town's provosts during his ministry:

Dr Burns was something more than an eminent clergyman – he was
in the truest and best sense of the word, a citizen of the town. He

⁹⁹ Ibid., p 60

¹⁰⁰ BURNS R.F., *Life and Times*, p 91-2

shrank from no labour, but threw himself with the whole force of his character into every good work. During his long residence among us there was no public question, no movement or organisation having for its object the social and political amelioration of the people, or the material, moral or spiritual wellbeing of the community which did not command and receive his eloquent advocacy and indefatigable working.....There is one sphere of his labours on behalf of this community in connection with which I was perhaps more than any other brought into contact with him.....My first connection with efforts for the relief of unemployed operatives was in 1837, and I well recollect the active labours of Dr Burns on that occasion; and on a similar state of matters in 1841 and 1842, it was my fortune to be associated with the Doctor as members of a deputation to London, to press the state of matters on the attention of the government, and to endeavour, by subscription, to raise money to relieve the starving population of this town, and I can never forget the herculean exertions which our friend put forth on that occasion.¹⁰¹

In fact Burns went on four deputations to London to raise the plight of the poor with the ministries of the day, and by the 1840s he had abandoned his stern view that support should be denied to the able-bodied. He wrote rather harshly of himself in the autobiographical notes which his son quotes that there had been a time when he thought of the Church of Scotland as “the Church, not of the people but of the constitution”.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp 93-4

In perfect harmony with this, stood, side by side with it a disinclination to do anything at all, ecclesiastically, for benefiting the temporal interests of the working classes. Often have I thought of the words of Paul in reference to an apostolic commission, “only they would that we should remember the poor” as in striking contrast to the apathy of so many modern Churchmen. When I first published my volume on the poor in 1818 I had by no means got above the dominant prejudice. Circumstances connected with the depression of trade and with the civil disabilities which impeded the prosperity of Scotland gradually enlarged and liberalised my views, and during the second half of the period of my ministry in Scotland, I not only felt and acted on the principle that the Church ought to *do more* than she had done for relief of the humbler classes, but I pleaded occasionally from the platform and from the press in behalf of the removal of iniquitous and oppressive laws, such as those which affected the importation of corn and provisions from foreign ports. With great difficulty did I obtain a scrimp majority of votes in our Presbytery for a searching enquiry into the causes of prevailing distress among the working classes of our community”.¹⁰²

Burns’ Change of Mind

The weaving industry, which had been the basis of Paisley’s economy since the first half of the eighteenth century, collapsed in the 1840s and 1850s. In 1837, 850 weavers and 60 dyers were made unemployed. Between 1841 and 1843 the number receiving poor relief rose from 2,180 to 11,885, and in the same period 67 out of 112 manufacturing firms failed and half of the 40 merchants went bankrupt. Alexander Wilson considers that during these years, “Paisley was probably the worst affected

¹⁰² Ibid., p 88

town in the Kingdom. With its heavy dependence on the market for fancy cloth, it was chronically affected by every recession in trade”.¹⁰³

The extent of Burns’ change of mind is seen in three lectures clearly influenced by Paisley’s depression which he delivered in Paisley in 1841 and 1842.¹⁰⁴ . He is now as persuaded as Patrick Brewster that the Christian minister must be involved in politics, though at the level of principle rather than party.¹⁰⁵ He recognises the limitations of political involvement which, he says, cannot regenerate humanity “without the religious and moral means which God has been pleased to appoint”, but the form of civil administration will dictate the extent to which these moral and religious influences will influence society, and so Christian ministers are bound to be concerned with civil administration.¹⁰⁶ He describes ministers who proudly claim to be “no politicians” as “a disgrace”¹⁰⁷ and he believes the reason that ministers and congregations of the Church of Scotland are so seldom seen to support political rights is that patronage and what he regarded as its corrosive effect had diminished political radicalism in the Church.

He continues to promote the need for an investigation into the causes of a nation’s prosperity¹⁰⁸ as well as into the degree of distress there is among the poor, and its causes¹⁰⁹ and when there is such widespread poverty “the inference is that there is

¹⁰³ WILSON, *Chartist Movement*, p 5

¹⁰⁴ BURNS, R., 1841 *A Plea for the Poor of Scotland, Two Lectures*, Paisley (*Plea*)
BURNS, R., 1842 *Christian Patriotism in times of Distress*, Paisley (*Christian Patriotism*)

¹⁰⁵ BURNS, *Christian Patriotism* p 5

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p 6

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*., p 7

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p 8

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p 10, 11

something wrong in the structure of society, and in the laws which regulate the intercourse of nations”.¹¹⁰

He is now convinced that there must be public, legislative provision for the poor whose needs cannot be met by private charity alone, though the public provision should not be seen as removing the need for private charity.¹¹¹ Without legislative provision for the poor there will be an inevitable and regrettable increase in begging.¹¹² Public provision for the poor should not be restricted to the provision of food, but of clothing and education also.¹¹³ Burns supports the establishment of a widespread programme of public works¹¹⁴ though, there is perhaps a degree of inconsistency between his support for public works and his belief that “collecting the paupers in gangs for the performance of parish work is found to be more immediately injurious to their conduct than even allowance or relief without requiring work”.¹¹⁵#

Perhaps because they clashed openly and disagreed on important areas of church and public policy, there has been a temptation to assume that Burns’ concern for the poor was somehow less than Brewster’s. This is not so. It should not be overlooked that Burns’ *Dissertations* were published in 1819, the year after Patrick Brewster was inducted to Paisley Abbey. While they may reflect a different attitude from the one Brewster was to take, and indeed from the one the author took subsequently, they provide evidence of a concern for the poor which is not found in any published work

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p 13

¹¹¹ BURNS *Plea* p 5

¹¹² Ibid., p 7

¹¹³ Ibid., p 22

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p 23

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p 13

or statements of Patrick Brewster's or in references to Brewster in the local Paisley press before the mid 1830s.

In the years immediately before his emigration to Canada, when he was more convinced of a minister's need to become involved in politics than he had been in his earlier years, Burns still placed individual regeneration inspired by the Gospel as essential in bringing about social improvement, but he was not alone in that, and it is significant that as an evangelical, he saw a place for public funding to provide work. He accepts without question the territorial parish as the appropriate vehicle for the provision of support for the poor, but in his 1841 and 1842 lectures he introduces a theme which was to become dominant in the later thinking of the theologian Robert Flint, who, as we shall discover, proposed the concept of the Kingdom of God as an alternative paradigm or model for Christianity's engagement with society. . Robert Flint's conviction was that the first duty of the Church was to find out the causes of poverty, and then, on the basis of what the Church discovers work for its elimination as a contribution to the Kingdom of God, Robert Burns insisted too that it was the Church's duty to investigate the causes of poverty. The decline of Paisley's economy and the consequent widespread distress had taught Burns that there was more to the causes of poverty than the moral failure of individuals.

Robert Buchanan

The Glasgow of Robert Buchanan's ministry was growing rapidly from around 275,000 in 1833, when he came to the city to 360,000 in 1851. The cotton industry, in which, it was estimated, over one third of the working population was employed in 1841 was declining and from then onwards the city's industrial strength

increasingly lay in shipbuilding and engineering. According to James Cleland's survey of Glasgow, quoted by T.D. Devine, at the time when Buchanan started his ministry, almost a quarter of the labour force in the city were casual workers, with low wages and no continuity of employment. "People like these" comments T.D. Devine, "had little economic power to create market demand for decent housing. Instead, they eked out a living in grossly overcrowded, subdivided tenements in the decaying heart of the booming cities".¹¹⁶

The city's working class, and in particular those who had made their living in the weaving industry, was concentrated in the east end of the city where the Tron parish was, around Trongate, Bridgegate, the Saltmarket and the Old Wynd. According to the Checklands, the average population per acre in Glasgow was around 65. In the Wynds area it was 583.¹¹⁷ Robert Buchanan estimated the figure to be almost twice that size.¹¹⁸ 13% of the city's population were paupers.

In a speech to the Free Church's Presbytery of Glasgow, Buchanan said "Social questions are now recognised on all hands to be the question of the day".¹¹⁹ The previous year, in a public lecture which argued for an increase in funds for educational provision, and making use of evidence from his own parish, Buchanan said that conditions "which abound in the lanes and alleys of our great metropolis have been compelling men to open their ears to the loud and gathering cry of those social evils which have been growing up unheeded around us".¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ DEVINE, T., 1999, *The Scottish Nation, 1700-200*, London, p 168

¹¹⁷ CHECKLAND, *Industry and Ethos*, p 40

¹¹⁸ BUCHANAN, *Spiritual Destitution I* p 7

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 7

¹²⁰ BUCHANAN, R., 1850, *The Schoolmaster in the Wynds*, Glasgow, p 1-2 (*Schoolmaster*)

Although Donald Smith admits that it would be “wrong to suggest that the Church in Scotland in the 1830s and 40s was unaware of the social evils and problems which were manifesting themselves in industrial society” he levels a serious charge against the Church in Scotland in the middle years of the nineteenth century. “Being insufficiently alive to the radical nature of the changes taking place in the whole fabric of social life, whereby a simple, agrarian, paternalistic society was being rapidly transformed into a complex, competitive, industrial one, the Church merely stressed with renewed emphasis in these decades the traditional moral virtues and values which were largely meaningless in the industrial context. It simply tried to moralise all the new social and economic relations by treating each transaction as a case of personal conduct, involving personal responsibility. In this way even the most complex social evils of industrial society were reduced to a matter of personal morality”.¹²¹ There is an element of truth in the charge, but not a sufficiently serious element to justify Smith’s outright dismissal. The Church was not alone in interpreting social ills in terms of individual morality, or the lack of it, and the approach of Robert Buchanan illustrates how difficult it is to make sweeping judgments even about the attitude of one particular Churchman. Undoubtedly Buchanan made the typical contemporary judgment that poverty could be attributed to a failure in personal morality. “Let anyone examine the rank and file of that huge army (of paupers) more than 70,000 strong, which has come like a cloud of locusts upon the city;” he wrote, “and when he has told off all those whose pauperism can be traced, without effort, to idleness, improvidence and intemperance, there will be little more than the mere skeleton of the army left behind”.¹²² In his speech to the Free Church’s Glasgow Presbytery in January 1851, however, intemperance, pauperism

¹²¹ SMITH, *Passive Obedience*, p 93

¹²² BUCHANAN, *Schoolmaster*, p 7

and crime receive only a passing mention, though their extent is described as a “flood-tide”; and in a subsequent pamphlet, they are referred to only to introduce the statistic that Glasgow spends £186,000 on pauperism and crime and only £36,000 on ministry and education.¹²³ As a result of Buchanan’s speech in the Free Presbytery of Glasgow, the Presbytery overtured the General Assembly on the issue of spiritual destitution, and in presenting the overture Buchanan described his parish area, which, he said, included the statistic that 115 places for the sale of alcohol, 63 pawn shops and 33 brothels. He criticised those in other areas of the city, who neither know nor care how the poorer population live. He asked how the city benefits if its commercial success masks such widespread poverty? He recognised that the conditions in his parish were exactly those which fuelled revolutionary flames on the continent, and as a solution, proposed “the old specific of well-wrought territorial Churches and schools” but at the same time stated forcefully the case for the provision of day schools, libraries and savings banks.¹²⁴ Although Buchanan subscribed to the common view which attributed poverty to moral failure, he was much more concerned to stress to the Church the consequences of poverty, and to accept that to a certain extent society has acquiesced in these. “We have refused to spend money on reforming society” he writes.¹²⁵ Unless society takes measures to prevent poverty and pauperism, “any thing like a real and lasting amelioration of the conditions of the poorer and most destitute classes of society may be regarded as hopeless”.¹²⁶ In his parish, Buchanan was the driving force behind putting a schoolmaster in the Wynds. He raised funds to buy a candle factory, set up a system of educational visitors based on Chalmers’ parochial restructuring a generation earlier, to provide schooling,

¹²³ BUCHANAN, R., 1851, *A Second Appeal on the Spiritual Destitution of the Masses in Glasgow*, Glasgow, p 8-9 (*Spiritual Destitution 2*)

¹²⁴ *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, 1851, p 304ff

¹²⁵ BUCHANAN, *Schoolmaster* p 8

¹²⁶ *Ibid* p 9

encouraging parents who could to pay for it, and relying on the support of patrons to provide for those who could not. “The men I especially plead for” he told the General Assembly of 1851, “are the decent hard working men who live (in the Wynds) and yet are still uncontaminated. I plead for the men who, with every disadvantage, are endeavouring to prevent themselves and their families from sinking lower in the scale. I plead for the men, numbers of whom may, ere another session passes, be elevated to the position of electors for the position of members of Parliament, and who need to be qualified for their trust”.¹²⁷ Buchanan acknowledges that what he saw in the Wynds forced him to see beyond ecclesiastical concerns: “Providence often assigns to an individual a particular work in such a way as leaves him no room to escape from doing it.....When I entered on the efforts which are now in progress in the Wynds, I had no thought of meddling with any further field. It was the discoveries made there that gradually forced upon me the general question of the state of the masses in the city at large”.¹²⁸ Buchanan believed that the moral condition of society determines its economic prosperity,¹²⁹ but that should not be construed as implying a lack of interest in improving the social conditions of the poorest in his parish.

In the context of his claim that Churchmen saw religion as a force of social control, Donald Smith quotes Buchanan saying to the General Assembly of 1851 that it is “infinitely cheaper to govern society by the Bible than by the sword. Churches cost far less than jails; and schools than poor law workhouses” which Smith regards as evidence of the Church’s appealing to the wealthy on the basis of their self interest.¹³⁰ Buchanan does occasionally employ that argument, but that fact should be seen within

¹²⁷ *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, 1851, p 316

¹²⁸ BUCHANAN, *Spiritual Destitution* 2

¹²⁹ BUCHANAN, *Schoolmaster* p 32

¹³⁰ SMITH, *Passive Obedience* p 100

a wider context. Buchanan drew a very unfavourable comparison between conditions in the Wynds, and those of the area of Blythwood and Garnethill which he describes as “socially as well as geographically one of the *higher* parts of the city”,¹³¹ and he goes on in the same passage to quote a survey undertaken by the Town Council showed that in 1841 the population of the Tron Parish was just over 10,000, 1586 of whom were aged between 6 and 16, of whom only 567 attended school, whereas in Blythwood and Garnethill, with a similar size of population, there were 1606 children between the ages of 6 and 16, 1508 of whom attended school. It is fair to say the Buchanan regards education as having a moral and spiritual purpose but he consistently recognises that it also has a vital social function. The uneducated, he realises, are the first to experience unemployment in time of recession.

In considering the better off, Buchanan moves beyond comparison to criticism. In introducing the Presbytery’s overture to the General Assembly of 1851, he contrasted conditions of profligacy, filth and crime which result in wives and children who “starve in rags and wretchedness in their miserable dwelling” with “the amount of heartless selfishness and unthinking gaiety that peoples, in others quarters of the city, its splendid streets and terraces and squares, and that neither knows nor cares how its poorer population lives”.¹³² This is not the language of someone uncritically acquiescing in the upward social mobility of those who had moved their homes west from the Tron parish, nor is it pandering to middle class self-interest.

Robert Buchanan’s approach to social improvement was conditioned by two axiomatic convictions, which were widely shared. The first was that the political

¹³¹ BUCHANAN, *Schoolmaster* p 14

¹³² *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, 1851, p 305

involvement which aimed at social improvement was not the business of the courts or the pulpits of the Church. As we have seen, Patrick Brewster's belief that it was placed him well ahead of his time in terms of social theology, and Brewster was a solitary supporter of that cause throughout Buchanan's years in the Tron parish. In his January 1851 speech to his Presbytery, Buchanan said

I am the friend and cordial advocate of all those sanitary and lodging house schemes by which cleanliness and comfort may be promoted in the dwellings of the people. I am, moreover, the relentless enemy of those countless dram-shops and pawn-shops which are the curse of the community, and am ready to come with heart and hand to the help of those who, like the Magistrates and Justices of this city, are labouring so zealously and so zealously to abate a class of nuisances which are among the chiefest nurseries both of our city's pauperism and our city's crime. With my whole soul I bid them God-speed. I do not enter, however, on the consideration of these and such-like measures here – not merely because they do not lie so properly within our province as a Church court – but because I am thoroughly persuaded that they will totally and utterly fail to effect what they are aiming at, unless they be accompanied at every step with those higher influences which flow from the Christian school and the house of God".¹³³

Later judgments may assess Buchanan to have been wrong both practically and politically, practically in that the Church was no longer able itself to meet the needs of the growing urban poor, and politically in that Buchanan did not give sufficient weight

¹³³ Buchanan, *Spiritual Destitution*, 1 p xx

to the possibilities contained in the growing municipalisation of services in the city, but it is wrong to accuse churchmen like him of neglecting social conditions or failing to attempt to improve them because the methods they believed would improve social conditions were not those of subsequent times.

Second, Buchanan not only followed Thomas Chalmers in the succession of ministers of Glasgow's Tron parish, he was convinced that Chalmers' aggressive territorial ministry provided the best framework not only for evangelism but for the improving of social conditions. "I know of nothing that will do" he said in January 1851, "but the scheme which Knox devised at the Reformation, and which Chalmers laboured to restore in our own day. Churches and schools upon the parochial or territorial system will, by God's blessing, give us back a humanised and Christianised population in the outfields of our city, and nothing else will. In saying this I am not to be understood as undervaluing these other means which have a more direct bearing upon the outward and physical conditions of the degraded masses whom we desire to benefit".¹³⁴

Mary Furnol has argued that Chalmers' attitude to poor relief has to be seen in the light of the conviction which grew during his ministry in Glasgow that unless he dealt with the issue of poor relief, and organised it in such a way that it did not monopolise his time and effort, he would never be able to concentrate on what by then he believed was his first task: the salvation of souls. If that is so, then, for Chalmers the revival of the parish system was required to tackle poverty for the sake of evangelism.¹³⁵ Although Buchanan was a disciple of Chalmers, his attitude to poverty and social

¹³⁴ Ibid, p 17

¹³⁵ FURGOL, M., "Chalmers and Poor Relief" in CHEYNE, A.C., 1985, *The Practical and the Pious*, Edinburgh, p 128

conditions was significantly different: he regarded evangelism as important for the sake of tackling poverty.

This is clear from the closing words of a speech Buchanan made at a banquet in 1859 to mark Queen Victoria's opening of the Loch Katrine Water works which he described as "perhaps the greatest public work of which any city in the Empire can boast. "I say, my Lord Provost, God-speed to your new Police Bill, with its sanitary improvements, and its regulations for preventing human cupidity from crowding our working-class population together like pigs of cattle without distinction of age or sex".

Only let not the other and still greater things be undervalued or undone. Let not those who, like myself, have striven for years to introduce education and religion into such localities as our vennels or winds, be told, as I have publicly been told, that we are beginning at the wrong end – that we must first wash, and clothe, and comfortably house, and feed the denizens of these neglected districts, and then try and make them religious. I say No; we are not beginning at the wrong end. Our Saviour did not first seize the poor demoniac who was dwelling in filth and misery among the tombs, and begin by washing and clothing his poor defiled and naked body. No; he began by casting out the evil spirit, by restoring him to his right mind, by healing his soul; and immediately the man washed and clothed himself, and came down and sat at the Saviour's feet.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ WALKER, N.L., 1877, *Robert Buchanan DD An Ecclesiastical Biography*, p 513

Buchanan was an Evangelical. He naturally stressed importance of preaching and conversion, but that does not imply that he lacked a social conscience. It is possible to fault Buchanan for failing to recognise that, with the migration of the successful from the old city centre westwards, and with the consequent result that people no longer lived where they worked, the basis of the territorial system which he advocated was becoming less tenable, just as it is possible he did not recognise the change in the Church which would come about when congregations were based where people spent their leisure time. However C.G. Brown has argued that Buchanan went beyond seeing the territorial area as the focus for social reform and became “the key inspiration to the mid-Victorian civic Gospel in Glasgow”¹³⁷. Brown regards Buchanan as “inspiring the beginnings of mass-scale slum clearance in Britain” through a Building Society which would first buy and then demolish property, a move which eventually saw the passing of the 1866 City Improvement Act.¹³⁸

Buchanan’s promotion of the Glasgow Free Church Building Society provoked criticism which led him to deliver and publish his second lecture of 1851 on spiritual destitution. In answer to the charge that it was not Churches which were required but schools and mission stations, Buchanan insists that the congregations which will gather in the Churches built will become involved in the social reforms required. They will “set on foot the schools and other subsidiary agencies which the work required”. It would be unjust not to recognise the extent to which Buchanan’s Church building and educational programmes had a social purpose, as is clear from what he says towards the end of his description of schooling in the wynds.

The reformation of the masses is a subject that branches out into
many wide and important details. Better dwellings for the working

¹³⁷ BROWN, C.G., “To be aglow with civic ardours: the “Godly Commonwealth in Glasgow” 1843-1914” in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, XXVI, 1996, p 183

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp 183-4

classes, the opening of new streets in dense and overcrowded districts, sanitary improvements, the state and working of the poor laws, and beyond and above all, these measures for ameliorating the physical condition of the people the educating of the young and the bringing of the hallowing influences and ordinances of religion to bear on even the poorest and most destitute of people. Here is one thing – a thing tangible and definite and definite – and lying at the same time at the very bottom of the whole question of social improvement. Let this be taken up and grappled with on an adequate scale, grappled with by the Christian liberality and the Christian agency of the evangelical denominations of Glasgow, and it will draw a thousand other reformatory measures in its train”.¹³⁹

While Buchanan still saw involvement in religion as the route to social reform, his ministry in Glasgow reflects a further development in the Church’s engagement with civil society. In his speech at the Loch Katrine Banquet, he specifically applauds the early steps towards municipalisation in the early Police Act, and his recognition of the necessity to provide libraries and schooling in his parish anticipates municipalisation in these areas. Buchanan’s ministry had an important social dimension to it. He was one of the most active members of the Glasgow Relief Fund Committee, set up in 1847 to respond to potato famine in Ireland and the highlands and islands of Scotland. He was involved in visiting the model lodging houses of the east end. He was a Trustee both of Anderson’s University and Hutcheson’s Hospital, institutions which were specifically for the poor. He was also instrumental in establishing the first

¹³⁹ BUCHANAN, *Schoolmaster* p 29

Savings' Bank which accepted deposits as low as one penny. Like others he saw poverty through an evangelical prism, but one which encouraged rather than obscured a keen social conscience. In insisting that the principal question of the day was the social question, he was anticipating a slogan taken up by men like Robert Flint, to direct further the Church's attention to the urgent need for social reform.

Norman Macleod

Norman Macleod was inducted to the Barony Parish in Glasgow in 1851, the year Robert Buchanan raised the issue of spiritual destitution in the Free Presbytery of Glasgow, and he was to remain there until his death. He had previously been minister in Loudoun and Dalkeith where his Tory convictions had made him unsympathetic to the weavers' political ambitions as expressed in support for Chartism. "The Chartists are put down. Good!" he wrote in his journal in April 1848.¹⁴⁰ He organised his congregation to share with him visits to the poorest parts of the parish. He established sewing and evening classes to increase the chances of employment. He formed a loan-fund to provide funds for those who wanted better housing or personal improvement. While at Dalkeith he founded the *Edinburgh Christian Magazine*, which never reached a great circulation, unlike its successor, *Good Words*, which Macleod edited from 1860 until his death in 1872.

AC Cheyne,¹⁴¹ and later Peter Hillis, quote a passage Macleod wrote in the *Edinburgh Christian Magazine* the year after he was inducted to the Barony, which

¹⁴⁰ MACLEOD, D., 1876, *Memoir of Norman MacLeod, DD, 2 Vols*, Vol 1 p 283 (*Memoirs*)

¹⁴¹ CHEYNE, A.C., 1983, *The Transforming of the Kirk*, Edinburgh, p 159, 160

Hillis claims “directly contradicted the prevailing social theology”.¹⁴² Macleod had written

The common idea at present is that the whole function of the Church is to preach and teach the gospel; while it is left to other organisations, infidel ones they may be, to meet all the other varied wants of our suffering people. And what is this but virtually to say to them, the Church of Christ has nothing to do as a society with your bodies, only with your souls, and that too, but in the way of teaching. Let infidels, then, give you better housing or better clothing, and seek to gratify your tastes and improve your social state; with all this, and thousand other things needful for you as men, we have nothing to do. What is this, too, but to give these men the impression that Christ gives them truth merely on Sabbath through ministers, but that He has nothing to do with what is given them every day of the week through other channels.¹⁴³

It is doubtful whether this is as clear a departure from the prevailing social theology as Hillis makes it out to be. Norman Macleod is certainly articulating the need for the Church to be concerned with social conditions, but that concern was part of the prevailing social theology, which held that the most effective way to improve social conditions was through the Church’s missionary, evangelistic and educational work. Norman Macleod, like Robert Buchanan, accepted that without question. He wrote “If ever society is to be regenerated, it is by the agency of living brothers and sisters in the Lord; *and every plan, however apparently wise, for recovering mankind from their degradation, and which does not make use of the personal ministrations of*

¹⁴² HILLIS, P., Towards a New Social Theology: The Contribution of Norman MacLeod, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 1992, p 268

¹⁴³ MACLEOD, *Memoirs*, ii, 7-8

*Christian men and women as an essential part of it, its very life is doomed, we think, to perish”.*¹⁴⁴

Norman Macleod consistently urged on the Church the need to be concerned for those in poverty. Hillis quotes a journal entry for March 27 1846 in which Macleod expresses support for improved sanitation, reading rooms and leisure facilities as evidence that Macleod foreshadowed the later recognition of the importance of environmental factors in social deprivation.¹⁴⁵ The conclusion of the passage, however, makes it clear that Macleod firmly adheres to the view that there is no social salvation outside the Church and to the prevailing orthodoxy that people's moral natures dictate their economic conditions: “The axiom ‘give the people always something to do’ deals with (man’s) active powers; the gospel and all the means of grace, with his moral nature; and as this is the mainspring of all he thinks and does, it is the most important of all; but it alone, as a system of truth separated from a system of action, which includes all reform, will not do. To preach a sermon, and refuse meat to the starving hearers, is mockery; and so says St James. To this I add, the necessity of a living, wise and Christian agency coming constantly into contact with men”.¹⁴⁶

None of this is to deny that Norman Macleod himself possessed a clear social conscience, and sought to develop one within the Church at large and within the Barony congregation. But it is clear from a very significant sermon, which has been neglected by historians,¹⁴⁷ published shortly after his death, that Macleod, doubtless because of his Tory principles, envisaged no fundamental change in the structured

¹⁴⁴ MACLEOD, N., 1862, *Parish Papers*, London, p 239

¹⁴⁵ HILLIS, p 269

¹⁴⁶ MACLEOD, *Memoirs*, I 233

¹⁴⁷ MACLEOD, N., 1872, *God’s Will be Done, Good Words*, pp 622-627 in a series of sermons preached to Queen Victoria.

order of society. It is a sermon which can be safely assumed to reflect Macleod's mature social theology. In it, Macleod asks what results there would be if God's will were to be established on earth? Society would remain, with relationships continuing as they were, but purged of envy and jealousy. Commerce would remain, but without any deception. The arts would remain, but only to beautify human existence. Amusement and leisure would remain, but devoid of dissipating temptation. Sickness and suffering would remain but they would be accepted as the opportunity to display meekness and faith. "And rich and poor would remain: but who can measure to what extent their relative position would be affected by the love and righteousness now possessed by both – by prudence, industry and sobriety, on the one hand; and by considerate kindness and liberality and sympathy on the other? If alms were needed, the poor would become richer in the love that supplied them; and the rich would also be made richer, by giving with the knowledge that it was more blessed to give than to receive". Bearing in mind Hillis' description of Norman Macleod as an exponent of a new social theology, it is tempting to compare that sermon with Patrick Brewster's attack referred to above ¹⁴⁸on complacency based on the Pauline advice "to be content".

For Macleod, God's will being done on earth basically involves a change in the human heart. "I wish you to see how responsible you are for the coming Kingdom of God, and for the doing of his will on earth as it is in heaven. *You are not responsible for directly changing 'the world without' nor 'the world within' in your fellows. Your responsibility is confined to yourself, to the state of your own inner being, in regards to the coming of God's Kingdom there, and the doing of God's will there,.....the*

¹⁴⁸ Page xxx (TO BE INSERTED IN FINAL VERSION)

world of nature, of society, of commerce, are not altered to you, but you are to them”.

[my emphasis]

That support for a solution to social ills by individual piety and commitment is to be found in entries in Macleod’s journal. Writing significantly in 1848, he says that changes in taxation, the suffrage, or education are in themselves sufficient, though when taken together they can be beneficial. “Yet there is to me a more excellent way, and that is love! The true and only cure seems to me to lie in the personal and regular communion of the better with the worse – man with man – until each Christian, like his Saviour, becomes one with those who are to be saved; until he can be bone of their bone, sympathise, teach, weep, rejoice, eat and drink with them as one with them in the flesh. The world will not believe because it cannot see that Christianity is true, by seeing its reality in the marvellous oneness of Christ and people.....Neither money nor schools nor tracts nor Churches can ever be substituted for living men. It is this we want. It is this the lanes and closes want”.¹⁴⁹

In 1866 Macleod wrote an article for *Good Words*, “How can we best relieve our deserving poor?”¹⁵⁰ In it, making good use of his skills as a story teller, he gives an example of the sort of individual commitment of “living men” which he believes is what is needed. A man was encountered sitting on a stone by the roadside in old fustian clothes “on the coldest of cold days”. He told the man who encountered him that he had been looking for work for three weeks. The passing Samaritan took the man home where he found there was no food in the house for the man or his wife or his five children, no fire in the grate, hardly any bedclothes, and shortly afterwards the

¹⁴⁹ MACLEOD, *Memoirs*, I, pp 285-287

¹⁵⁰ MACLEOD, N., *Good Words*, 1866 pp 554-562. Published as a pamphlet separately the same year. (*Improving the Conditions of the Poor*)

man attempted to hang himself but was cut down by his wife in time to save his life. “As an able bodied man” he said, “I could get nae relief from the parish; but I kent if I were deid they wid be obliged tae help my widow and orphans”. Thanks to help from the passing Samaritan, Macleod comments, “two pounds judiciously laid out restored him to comparative comfort; a note to an employer obtained him work, and he has never wanted since”.¹⁵¹ Macleod uses that story to introduce three of his firm principles with regard to parochial, palliative social work: just a little money can make a big difference, the absolute importance of personal contact and visitation, and “while legal charity spends its hundreds of pounds, Christian charity, if its dispensers are properly organised, would with its tens attain, in every respect, higher results”.¹⁵² Further on in the same article he looked back to the working, through the Church, of the old Scottish Poor Law, “by which, whether the money for the poor was raised by a self-imposed tax authorised by law, or by voluntary contributions on the part of the Heritors, or at the Church door every Sunday, its disposal was entrusted to the ministers and elders of each parish. Personal knowledge and home visitation were its very life and blood, and made it, in our humble opinion, at once the most economical and most Christian that ever existed in our country”.

Norman Macleod’s social vision, therefore, still harked back to the rural model, by his time in the Barony no longer remotely relevant. Nor did his social vision envisage the transformation of society. The theologian Robert Flint, who was close to him in the years when he was an assistant in the Barony, describes him as being “fully alive to the importance of Churches keeping aloof, as far as possible, from the struggles in

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p 556

¹⁵² Ibid., p 557

the arena of politics”.¹⁵³ In the same article, Flint describes Macleod as “the greatest pastor which any Scottish parish had possessed since Chalmers left St John’s, Glasgow”.¹⁵⁴ This in part explains why Macleod did not develop his social concern into a coherent social theology. His concern was for the pastoral care of those entrusted to him and his congregation. Inevitably the size of the social problems in the Barony parish of 87,000 souls made him turn instinctively to the palliative measures which were so obviously and urgently needed, rather than a rigorous critique of structural poverty which he was intellectually and temperamentally unsuited. Flint’s wrote that Macleod “was not in distinctive sense a theologian”. . He lacked creative originality, but “although not a great theologian, (he) exerted, a great, and I believe most beneficial influence on our theology.....If he reproduced and popularised – if he transfused into the religious consciousness of his countrymen, as no one else had equal power to do – the thoughts of men like Arnold and Campbell, who will venture to maintain that this was not, on the whole, a much needed and valuable service”.¹⁵⁵

Norman Macleod was as conscientious a disciple of Thomas Chalmers in his approach to the territorial structure of the Church’s activity and the congregational organisation required to service it as was Robert Buchanan. In 1866, in *How Can we Best Relieve our Deserving Poor?* Macleod wrote that whatever Chalmers’ reputation as a theologian or as a Church leader “he is destined to tell on the future more even than he has done in the past, by his wise and sagacious plans – the growth of a thoughtful mind, a Christian spirit and great experience – for elevating the masses

¹⁵³ FLINT, R., “Norman MacLeod” in 1883, *Scottish Divines, St Giles’ Lectures, 3rd Series*, Edinburgh p 452

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p 439

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp 454,5

economically and spiritually”.¹⁵⁶ In an earlier article, Macleod had described enthusiastically what he had seen of the application of Chalmers’ parochial system in the German town of Elberfeldt: “In 1852 the town was in embarrassment, pauperism was advancing with the hugest strides, the poor rates were enormous, the income fell far below the expenditure, the number of poor was upwards of 4000 or 1 in 12. In 1857 the town breathed freely, the poor rates were trifling, the reduced assessments much more than covered the need, and the number of poor had fallen to 1400, or 1 in 38, and was still falling”.¹⁵⁷ In his article on poor relief, he described in considerable detail the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor which was organised on Chalmersian lines, with the city divided into 22 districts each one supervised by a committee of five, and the districts further divided into 25 sections. He glimpses the need for municipal or political action when he says that “one of the benefits conferred by such a society is its influence in creating a right public opinion, “which must precede any legislation required to effect sanitary reforms on a large scale”.¹⁵⁸

Conclusion

These four Churchmen, in their different ways, cast doubts on the judgment, frequently made, that the Church of Scotland in the middle years of the nineteenth century showed no interest in the social conditions of the poor or in tackling the problems presented by the rapidly increasing urban population.

Brewster and Burns on the one hand, and Buchanan and Macleod on the other do not simply represent the response of the Church in different locations, they reflect the response of the Church to different periods and different economic situations.

¹⁵⁶ MACLEOD, *Improving the Conditions of the Poor* p 562

¹⁵⁷ MACLEOD, “Dr Chalmers at Elberfeldt”, in 1860 *Good Words*, p 5

¹⁵⁸ MacLeod, *Improving the Conditions of the Poor*, p 562

Brewster and Burns were at work during the “hungry forties”, when Paisley faced the worst depression of the century. Buchanan and Macleod reflect, to a considerable extent, the much more optimistic outlook of the period of Glasgow’s growing commercial success, when the city benefited from Free Trade and industrial change. As they both point out, however, the benefits of success were not shared throughout the city. Buchanan and Macleod also belong to a time when it was beginning to be recognised that urban poverty would be neither manageable nor containable.

As has been shown, all four of these Churchmen, in different ways, made social improvement dependent on the Church. Patrick Brewster saw the Church as having a God-given role throughout history to support the weak and powerless, and in his own day to be the engine of social reform. Robert Burns, in his *Dissertations*, makes clear that in his view at that time, support for the poor through the Kirk Session is preferable, although later he saw the need for legal assessments, but he still saw the Church playing an important part. Robert Buchanan was convinced that it was through evangelism and Church extension that movements for social reform would be inspired, and Norman Macleod energised and restructured the congregational life of the Barony precisely because he believed it was only through the ministrations of Christian people that poverty would be alleviated.

All four were not only convinced of the central place which the Church had to occupy in social reform and the alleviation of poverty, they all accepted that Thomas Chalmers’ experiment in a revitalised territorial system still was the ideal vehicle for the expression of the Church’s social concern.

Industrialisation and urbanisation had, however, brought social and political changes which made it no longer possible or desirable for the Church to be the agent of social welfare, but the Church of Brewster and Burns, Buchanan and Macleod had no model which enabled these concerned churchmen, in their outlook, to retain a significant place for the Church while recognising the limitations on its activity in a rapidly changing urban context.

Caution has to be exercised in accepting some of the judgments which have been made about all four ministers. Patrick Brewster's personal abrasiveness and political ineptness need to be placed alongside his reputation as a radical reformer. Robert Burns' early analysis of provision for the poor and later insistence on the church's involvement in social issues must be seen as much part of the picture as his early conservatism and caution. Robert Buchanan's practical social concern, espousing of a gospel for the city and criticism of middle-class complacency are as significant as his passionate evangelicalism, while Norman Macleod's innate conservatism and what his brother Donald was later to call "ecclesiasticism" suggest that Flint's view that Norman MacLeod lacked intellectual creativity can be applied to his attitude to social reform as well as to his theological viewpoint.

However, most important of all, these four churchmen all lacked a model which would allow them to regard the church as part of the solution to social problems and capable of making a contribution towards social reform without making the institutional church central to any view of or proposals for social improvement. Norman Macleod's sometime assistant and friend, Robert Flint, was to provide a

model which created a paradigm shift in the church's attitude to social issues in the later years of the 19th and early years of the 20th century.

Chapter 2

FROM GODLY COMMONWEALTH TO KINGDOM OF GOD

Introduction

Owen Chadwick draws attention to a lecture which Matthew Arnold gave to the London clergy on 22 February 1876,¹⁵⁹ in which Arnold spoke about the realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth. Arnold said that contemporary teaching, preaching and creeds stressed matters very different from the primitive gospel preached by Jesus. “This Gospel was the ideal of popular hope and longing, and immense renovation and transformation of things: *the Kingdom of God*”.¹⁶⁰ He continued “This was the idea of Jesus: the establishment on earth of God’s Kingdom, of felicity, not by the violent processes of our Fifth Monarchy men, or of the German Anabaptists, or of the French Communists, but by the establishment on earth of God’s righteousness”¹⁶¹ According to Chadwick, the Bishop of Colombo, Piers Claughton attacked Arnold’s interpretation of the Kingdom of God, but the clergy overwhelmingly gave Arnold their support, which leads Chadwick to observe that “in the (eighteen) eighties, the theologians started writing books on the social impact of Christianity, but the scene at Arnold’s lecture shows that before that time the younger clergy of London moved towards what would later be described as the social gospel”.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ CHADWICK, O., 1970, *The Victorian Church*, 2 Vols, London, Vol 2 p 272

¹⁶⁰ ARNOLD, M., 1877, *Last Essays on Church and Religion*, LONDON, p 123

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p 125

¹⁶² CHADWICK, *op. cit.*, p 273

In 1859, seventeen years before Arnold delivered his Sion College lecture, and in the year when Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, Robert Flint, a young Church of Scotland minister in his first parish, preached a series of sermons in which he developed in far greater depth than Arnold did, the same thesis about the Kingdom of God. He was the first writer in Britain to explore the extent to which the teaching of Jesus envisaged a divine realm which would be realised on earth when his sermons were published in 1865.¹⁶³ It is clear that by then Flint had read Darwin and accepted a number of his ideas. In the following fifty years, the understanding of the Kingdom of God on earth was to become a key concept for the theological and practical expression of social Christianity, and Flint's introduction of it marks a paradigm shift in social theology. Flint died in 1910, and he continued to express his views on the Kingdom of God throughout his subsequent career, and the expression of these views changed little, if at all.

Robert Flint was born in 1834 in Dumfriesshire, the son of a tenant sheep farmer. The family moved to Glasgow, where Robert spent five years in the faculty of arts and five in the faculty of divinity though, he did not graduate. He was a contemporary, though not an exact one, of Norman Macleod's brother Donald. During Flint's final year as a Glasgow student, in 1857, he was appointed the missionary of the recently formed Glasgow Elders' Association. The area where he was sent to work was around the foot of the High Street, in between the parishes of Norman Macleod and Robert Buchanan. The following year he became first missionary and then assistant to Norman Macleod in the Barony, succeeding Norman's brother Donald who had just been inducted to his first charge in Lauder. One year later he succeeded John

¹⁶³ FLINT, R., 1865, *The Kingdom of Christ on Earth*, EDINBURGH (Flint: *Kingdom*)

Marshall Lang as minister of the East Church in Aberdeen. Unlike Donald Macleod and Marshall Lang, Flint's career was not to take him back to Glasgow, but his influence on the work of these men was considerable.

In the winter of 1859-60 in the East Church of Aberdeen, , and again after he had moved to the parish of Kilconquhar in the East Neuk of Fife in 1862, , Flint preached the series of sermons on the Kingdom of God, which were later included in his first volume of sermons and addresses. Flint had only been minister of Kilconquhar for only two years when he applied for and was appointed to the chair of moral philosophy in the University of St Andrews, a post he held until he became Professor of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh in 1876.

The Kingdom of Christ upon Earth

In this work, Flint outlines in eight sermons his understanding of the Kingdom of God. The first of these sermons, (The nature of God's Kingdom on earth) is on the text from the Lord's Prayer in Matthew chapter six, "Thy Kingdom come" and the remainder on the parables of the Kingdom contained in Matthew chapter thirteen: the parables of the sower, the wheat and the tares, the mustard seed, the leaven, the treasure hidden in a field, the pearl of great price and the dragnet.

In his introductory sermon on the nature of the Kingdom of God, Flint uses what he sees as the process of historical development to suggest that it represents a gradual progression towards the Kingdom of God through the overcoming of evil "so that wherever it is there, (God's) Kingdom has not yet come and He is robbed of that

sovereignty which he is most jealous of”.¹⁶⁴ Quoting a few Old Testament references, and what he understands to be the messages of John the Baptist and Jesus, Flint goes on to insist that the Kingdom does not occupy the central place in modern thought which it does in the Bible.¹⁶⁵ Our understanding of that Kingdom must be based on the biblical revelation and the product of human reason.¹⁶⁶

Several themes run through the subsequent sermons. First, Flint sees the emergence of God’s Kingdom against the background and within the context of a continuing struggle between God and Satan, good and evil. Where evil exists, God’s Kingdom has not yet been realised. Although this is made clear in the opening sermon of the series,¹⁶⁷ it is, understandably, in his treatment of the parable of the wheat and the tares that it is more clearly outlined. Within the boundaries of the Kingdom, the conflict between God and Satan is traced through biblical examples from Cain and Abel, through Judas and Ananias and Sapphira, to the Churches of the Book of Revelation. Flint concludes that since all good comes from God and all evil from Satan, then not only human history and society as a whole will reflect this tension, but the Kingdom of God will do so also. “The fact is this: Within the outward or visible limits of the Kingdom of God there are many who are not truly of it; many who bear the name while they have not the nature of Christian disciples; many who pass for children of the light while children of the darkness. This perplexing fact is permanent”.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ FLINT, *Kingdom* p 60

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p 62

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p 92

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp 57-60

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p125

Second, and as a corollary to the struggle between good and evil, Flint believes that God brings order out of the conflict of innumerable human wills. He expands a theme which he outlines in the introductory sermon, that the Kingdom of divine power, initiated by Christ, has been advancing, despite opposition, since Christ's departure from earth. He recognises, therefore, that the Kingdom of God is not a pattern or structure to be applied, still less to be imposed, but rather an ideal which emerges, develops, grows, and for this reason particularly he believes nature parables are appropriate in describing it. The Kingdom emerged from the germ of Christ's life and death,¹⁶⁹ and when human labour and effort is added to it, there is continuous growth over time. Just as plant life provides for mutation, so theology reflects a diversity of insights.¹⁷⁰ In his sermon on the parable of the sower, Flint argues that although the different types of soil represent varieties of the human character, they are not to be regarded as exclusive of each other. Each person is made up of different responses to the Kingdom.¹⁷¹ Because the Kingdom grows and develops, it is not possible to envisage a return to some primitive simplicity. Thus force and persecution are never justified in the cause of the Kingdom of God, and any attempt to make sectarian or denominational principles a condition of Church privileges or Church membership is sinful.¹⁷² Flint recognises that his conviction that the Kingdom is realised through the gradual overcoming of evil, and growth towards the emerging reign of God, has several consequences. He writes that the parable of the tares, which are left in the farmer's field alongside the wheat until harvest, as well as indicating that growth

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p 156

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., pp 163-165

¹⁷¹ Ibid., pp 93-4

¹⁷² Ibid., pp 150ff

implies divergence, suggest that tolerance, even of error, is necessary as the Kingdom develops.¹⁷³

Flint points out that the growth of a plant is an inadequate symbol for the Kingdom of God because the Gospel, unlike an individual plant, must relate to and have an effect on “surrounding elements”.¹⁷⁴ So the parable of the leaven, which spreads through the dough and alters its nature and properties is a more appropriate symbol to describe the effect of the Kingdom of God on society. The Kingdom pervades society, and even where the Gospel is not accepted, it nevertheless so infiltrates the structures of society that it changes them.

The Gospel is not without influence even where it is not closed with as the power of God until salvation. It so far imbues, or at least modifies, by its spirit all the laws, institutions and usages of society, that none, not even those most hostile to it, live as they would have done if it had not been. It improves the characters and conduct of men in every case, although it may be only seldom that it works a genuine conversion in them.¹⁷⁵

It is against that background that Flint makes his most specific comments with regard to the Kingdom of God and the Church. He uses the strongest of language to reject any identification of the Kingdom of God and with the Church, which he describes as “the most common and not the least pernicious” of the erroneous views of the

¹⁷³ Ibid., pp 142-143, 163

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p 170

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p 189

Kingdom of God.¹⁷⁶ Since the arts, literature and science, and indeed the state itself, have separated themselves from the Church, they have been able independently to contribute towards the Kingdom of God.

Are we to conclude that all these things have become atheistical, irreligious, unchristian, because they have separated themselves from the Church, asserted rights of their own, and jealously guard these rights? Assuredly no. The Church is not the Kingdom of God, and these elements of social life, in separating themselves from the Church, have not separated themselves from the Kingdom of God; nay, by the very act of rejecting the control of the Church they set aside the mediation of the Church between them and the Kingdom of God, and secured for themselves, as a portion of their independence, the right of standing in immediate contact with the Word and the Kingdom of God. Before their independence they were related to the Kingdom of God only through their connection with the Church; now, since their independence, they may justly claim to be portions of the Kingdom of God, each one of them as much a portion of it as the Church itself.¹⁷⁷

That is a crucial passage for the development of social theology the Scottish Church. By the 1890s, when the Presbyterian Churches were ready to accept that they had a role in social development and were beginning to develop a social theology, the conviction that the Church and the Kingdom of God were separate was regarded as axiomatic. Those who disagreed strongly over whether, or to what extent the Church

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp 64-65, 69

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p 71

should advance the Kingdom of God by being socially engaged were in complete agreement that the Church and the Kingdom of God were not one and the same. Both sides in the argument which developed accepted what Flint went on to conclude from the separation of the Church and the Kingdom, namely that agencies other than the Church could contribute towards the realisation of the Kingdom, and, as we shall see,¹⁷⁸ that was of crucial importance in the development of the Church's social theology.

There are those, Flint points out, who may bemoan that the power of the Church is diminished by what Flint calls "elements in social life" separating themselves from the Church but what is lost to the Church is not lost to the Kingdom of God.¹⁷⁹ The conflict between the Kingdom of God and the power of evil is not the same as the tension between the Church and the world¹⁸⁰ because the Church is a means to an end, and if that had been recognised, then less time would have been spent on controversies, and the Church would have avoided being used as an instrument of state persecution on religious grounds.¹⁸¹ When the Church's power was at its highest, the Kingdom of God virtually disappeared. As the Church's control over society has declined, society has been included within the Kingdom of God.¹⁸² This is a view of the Church's history which Patrick Brewster also held very strongly, although he does not make use of the term "Kingdom of God".

In his sermons on the parables of the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great price, Flint's language is at its most evangelical. He believes these parables were

¹⁷⁸ See below p **TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION**

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., pp 65-70

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pp 76-78

¹⁸¹ Ibid., pp 80-82

¹⁸² Ibid., p 65

addressed to disciples, because they describe the effects of the Kingdom of God on those who have embraced it totally. So he talks of Christ as saviour and the absolute necessity of salvation¹⁸³ and the enrichment of those who have found Christ,¹⁸⁴ stressing that the Kingdom of God is a personal possession as well as a power in society.¹⁸⁵

Flint notes a number of consequences of the separation of Church and Kingdom. It is the Kingdom of God which is in conflict with the world of evil, and so any attempt to keep the Church undefiled by contact with the world is false. If the Church is recognised as a means to an end, energy spent on ecclesiastical controversies is seen to be wasted. The Church can accommodate itself to other agencies in society, knowing what its own, inviolable sphere is. The Church would not be distracted from its true work of preaching the Gospel by directly interfering in aspects of society which do not directly concern it.¹⁸⁶ As well as enabling the Church to include other elements in society in the advancement of the Kingdom of God, Flint's encouraging of the Church to have sufficient confidence in itself and its own "inviolable sphere" enabled the Church to escape from the view that the Church itself, and the evangelical enterprise were essential to social progress, precisely the view from which men like Brewster and Burns, Buchanan and Macleod were unable to escape.

It is another dominant theme in Flint's understanding of the Kingdom of God, that it becomes a power in society when and because it becomes a personal possession. It

¹⁸³ Ibid., p 210

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p 214

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp 223-224

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., pp 77-81

“begins within”,¹⁸⁷ by replacing an individual’s unpredictable conduct and wickedness with surrender to God’s will and holiness.¹⁸⁸ When the Gospel works on the heart of a person then it persuades that person to work to change society,¹⁸⁹ and if the Gospel does not produce that determination to change society, then it has not been fully effective.¹⁹⁰ Individuals who have understood the Gospel are committed to hasten in the Kingdom of God where they are.¹⁹¹ In this connection, there is what may be a significant change between what appears in *Christ’s Kingdom upon Earth* and his Edinburgh University lecture notes. In the former Flint says that “the doctrine of the cross is indeed hidden in a heart as leaven”,¹⁹² whereas in his lecture notes on the parable of the leaven, he says it is “the Christian life” which is hidden as leaven.¹⁹³

In a separate sermon on Christian Citizenship, Flint says that Jesus paid very little attention to people’s relationship to society because he knew that when someone was in a right relationship with God, then his relationship to society will be right also.¹⁹⁴

When we have proved that the Gospel produces a complete change on the human heart, we have really proved that it produces a complete change on human society. Society is made up of individuals. A society cannot be bad if the individuals that compose it are good. If we have succeeded, then, in showing that, like leaven changing meal into bread, the Gospel working on the carnal heart of the natural man changes it into the new heart of the spiritual man, we have necessarily in and by that

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p 63

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p 60

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p 181

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p 182

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p 194

¹⁹² Ibid., p 173

¹⁹³ Flint Papers, Edinburgh University Library, Box 688, Notebook pp 6-7 (see Notes 41-43 below)

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p 265

very proof shown that the Gospel is a power to effect an entire change for the better on society, a power to convert it from carnal into spiritual.¹⁹⁵

The significance of Flint's views on the Kingdom of God, however, does not lie in his view of the individual Christian's commitment to improving conditions in society, and on the effect on society of a committed Christian person. In that he is saying nothing more or less than Norman Macleod or Robert Buchanan did. What was of great significance, as a consequence of his conviction that Church and Kingdom were not identical, was his understanding that through forms of public service outside the work of the Church, and by the commitment of those who might not have a personal faith, the Kingdom of God nevertheless advances.

The Kingdom of God is not to be established among us in this country solely by the services of the sanctuary, or directly religious exercises and instruction. A legislator by obtaining good laws, a poet by writing ennobling verses, a country gentleman by an active interest in the wellbeing of those who are on his estates and in his neighbourhood, and every class of men by the faithful discharge of their duties in commerce or trade, science or art, may help and hasten on the coming of the Kingdom of God without entering into the ecclesiastical sphere of action¹⁹⁶

Flint's successor as Professor of Divinity in Edinburgh, William P. Paterson, contributed a chapter on Flint's theology to his biography. Strangely. However, for one who himself embraced Flint's views on the Kingdom of God, Paterson does not

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p 181

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p 71

mention his predecessor's views on the Kingdom, but Flint's biographer, Donald MacMillan describes *Christ's Kingdom upon Earth* as "full of sound and original teaching" which Flint issued "as a manifesto of his teaching to the more thoughtful public, and at the same time as a proof of his powers and qualifications for a professorial chair,"¹⁹⁷ Two more recent studies of Flint's thought also pay little attention to Flint's view of the Kingdom, which he was to continue to express throughout his life. A. P. F. Sell only mentions *The Kingdom of Christ upon Earth* in a footnote, to cite a reference for Flint's belief in human depravity.¹⁹⁸ S. R. Obitt devotes six pages to Flint's understanding of the Kingdom of God, discussing it within the context of Flint's philosophy of history and his belief that it was Christianity which introduced the concept of history as the working of a divine plan.¹⁹⁹ It may be that in comparison with the rationalistic philosophy which Flint was to use in arguing for the existence of God, or with his support for advances in the physical sciences and biblical criticism, Flint's views on the Kingdom of God are less significant, but as will be shown²⁰⁰ they were crucial in providing a context in which the Glasgow ministers Donald Macleod, John Marshall Lang and others were able to outline a religious critique of the conditions of deprivation which prevailed in the city and to endorse, from a religious perspective, the work of secular agencies in attempting to meet these conditions. What Flint's work on the Kingdom of God did was to provide the critical apparatus which men like Norman Macleod and Robert Buchanan lacked in their examination of the Church's role in the developing social crisis in the west of Scotland. That significance apart, Flint's views were remarkably

¹⁹⁷ MACMILLIAN, D., 1914, *Life of Professor Flint*, London p 131 (*Life of Flint*)

¹⁹⁸ SELL, A.P.F., 1987, *Defending and Declaring the Faith, Some Scottish Examples 1860-1920*, Exeter, pp 62, 238 . (*Defending and Declaring*)

¹⁹⁹ OBITTS, S.R., 1962 *The Theology of Robert Flint*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh

²⁰⁰ Below, pp xxx **COMPLETE IN FINAL VERSION**

original, especially when it is considered that he was not yet thirty when he first expounded them.

The Kingdom and Ecclesiology in Flint

Flint's papers are held in Edinburgh University Library in fifty eight boxes,²⁰¹ and in New College Library in three boxes.²⁰² Five of the boxes in Edinburgh University Library contain his lectures on the Kingdom of God and on Ecclesiology. There are four notebooks which contain lecture notes on ecclesiology. One can be dated to 1883,²⁰³ another two to around 1898,²⁰⁴ and a fourth is housed along with other material from the same period. One of the boxes in New College Library contains lecture material on the Kingdom of God.²⁰⁵

As would be expected from what he had written in *The Kingdom of Christ upon Earth*, Flint insists in his lectures that any doctrine of the Church must be dependent on the doctrine of the Kingdom. "There is a theology which puts the doctrine of the Church in the foreground – which finds in this doctrine a rule and test by which to measure and judge all other doctrines. But such a theory is a profound contradiction to the spirit and character of the teaching of our Lord". However Flint is adamant that this should not be understood as indicating either that the Church itself, or the

²⁰¹ Edinburgh University Library Handlist of Manuscripts H57, Gen 631-688 (Boxes 652 [Christian Ecclesiology notes 1 vol n.d.], 667-8 [Notebooks on prayer, the Church etc., 2 vols n.d.] 687 [Collection of essays, lectures, admonitions, speeches, etc.], 688 [Flint's letters, accounts, publishing correspondence, papers connected with Edinburgh University courses, final draft of all lectures])

²⁰² New College Library, MSS FLI 1-3

²⁰³ Box 688 contains a notebook with the text of three lectures, one of which (in a series on the Westminster Confession of Faith) includes a reference to essays which would be required during 1883 from William P. Paterson and George Milligan (*Flint, Lecture 2*) and another of which contains exercises set for six students, two of whom (W.L. Gordon and W B. Stevenson) are known to have studied under Flint around the end of the 1880s. (*Flint, Lecture 3*) The third lecture on ecclesiology (*Flint, Lecture 4*) cannot be dated.

²⁰⁴ Box 667 (notebooks on prayer, the Church, etc., 2 vols n.d.) These volumes contain references to "discourses" to be delivered by students, two of whom, A.J. Campbell and Alex C. Buchanan) can be identified (through the *Fasti*) as studying divinity at Edinburgh in 1898-1900 (*Flint Lecture 1*)

²⁰⁵ MSS H9 FLI 3, pp 1-8

doctrine of the Church are unimportant²⁰⁶ He believes that to hold a low view of the Church is false and unscriptural.²⁰⁷ The Church has been instituted to bring the saving power of the Gospel to bear on the individual, the family, the state and on all humanity, and is the principal agent and instrument to “arrest the sway of evil, purify social principle and practice, restore the civil order, and, in a word, renew the state as well as the family”.²⁰⁸ Flint believed that in instituting the Church, Christ said very little about it except to provide for it a ministry and sacraments, but he contrasts the Roman Catholic ecclesiology which sees the Church as the visible continuation of what Christ was on earth (Where the Church is, there is Christ) with the Reformed doctrine which believes that where Christ is, there is the Church. “The Church, then, is to be regarded as a society which owes its origin not merely to the will of its members, but also to the will of Christ exhibited in Scripture. The notion that it is simply a human and voluntary association of Christians is an inadequate one”.²⁰⁹

In a notebook entitled “Christian Ecclesiology Notes” Flint says that ecclesiology must be related to eschatology. “No small part of the error into which men have fallen respecting the future of humanity on earth, the ultimate issues of the Kingdom of God, the resurrection, the final judgment and eternal state has had its origin in the failure to appreciate the truths involved in a correct Ecclesiology. The Church is not confined to earth. The Kingdom of God extends over heaven as well as earth. The life which animates the Church is of a celestial and eternal nature”.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ *Flint Lecture 3*

²⁰⁷ *Flint Lecture 4*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Box 652 1 vol, n.d.

Flint therefore accepts that there is a visible and an invisible Church and he enlarged on this in a lecture on Chapter XXV of the Westminster Confession of Faith “on the catholic or universal invisible Church and the catholic or universal visible Church”.. In this lecture he says that an invisible Church comprising all the elect is closer to the New Testament’s teaching on the Church than is any visible Church.²¹¹ Elsewhere he claims that when the New Testament describes the Church, as a rule it idealises it as “the individual and stainless body of Christ in which there are no unredeemed or unelected members”. And so although sometimes the New Testament appears to be referring to the visible Church, it does so in terms which are actually applicable only to the invisible Church.²¹² The invisible Church is not only distinct from the world, it is also distinct from the visible Church, which is largely the world, and often the most worldly part of the world.²¹³ The visible Church is an *ekklesia* in the original sense of being “called out”, , not “from the world”, but called “out of their houses”. There is no separation of the Church visible from the world,²¹⁴ because “the salvation which Christ has wrought out for man is not an individualistic salvation. It is personal redemption indeed, but it is also a social one”, and the role of the visible Church is to continue on earth the work of Christ.²¹⁵ The invisible Church is not only an *ekklesia*, it also represents a special aspect of the Kingdom of God. “Christ’s Headship of Kingship over the invisible Church is no merely ecclesiastical matter, but one which extends over states and nations as much as over visible Churches. His Kingdom is not of this world in Church and state, yet it is over this world in both. He is the one rightful supreme Head and King alike in Church and State; in the latter not less than

²¹¹ *Flint, Lecture 2*

²¹² *Flint, Lecture 1*

²¹³ *Flint Lecture 2*

²¹⁴ *Flint, Lecture 1*

²¹⁵ *Flint, Lecture 4*

in the former”.²¹⁶ When Flint here says that Christ’s Kingdom is “not of this world”, he is clearly does not mean that the Kingdom of Christ does not pertain to mundane things, but rather that the values and standards, principles and practice of the Kingdom are those of the Sermon on the Mount, “other-worldly” in the sense of not being considered of worldly importance. He says that Christ “clearly taught that his Kingdom is an essential present power and life in the heart of the religious man. It is primarily internal – what the spirit has in itself when it possesses certain graces”, a truth taught in the Beatitudes.²¹⁷

In 1882, Flint gave a lecture in Newington Parish Church in which he defended the establishment of the Church of Scotland against attack from the Voluntaries of the United Presbyterian Church, and those whom he regarded as quite illegitimately and inconsistently attempting to convert the Free Church to an anti-establishment stance. He used his understanding of the Church (of Scotland) as an agent of God’s Kingdom to argue that the nation was under God’s sovereignty and therefore the civil is no less an aspect of the Kingdom of God than the ecclesiastical, and so “the Church of Scotland is by her very existence a testimony to the State’s recognition of its duty to provide for the religious instruction of its people”.²¹⁸

Flint’s views of the Kingdom of God in their contemporary context

Two names are associated with the Kingdom of God in the middle years of the nineteenth century: on the continent, Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), and in England Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872). Ritschl’s understanding of the Kingdom of

²¹⁶ *Flint, Lecture 2*

²¹⁷ *Flint Lecture 3*

²¹⁸ FLINT, R., 1905, *On Theological, Biblical and Other Subjects*, Edinburgh, p 428 The lecture reprinted in this volume is entitled “Duties of the People of Scotland to the Church of Scotland”

God was outlined in a three-volume work, the first part of which was translated into English as *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* in 1872, while the three volumes were originally published in German between 1870 and 1874. Flint's work predates this. Ritschl had been teaching and lecturing in systematic theology from 1852 onwards²¹⁹. Flint may have encountered Ritschl's work prior to preaching his sermons on the Kingdom of God in 1859 or their publication in 1865. His biographer records that he once said "he could master a German book...of a couple of hundred pages, in a night or two",²²⁰ and that he regularly travelled in Germany. However, according to William P Paterson, Flint "had little respect" for Ritschlian theology,²²¹ and would not have accepted Ritschl's view that "the realisation of the Kingdom of God is clearly shown as a result and a product of a common human ethical activity",²²² or that "the Kingdom of God consists of those who believe in Christ, inasmuch as they treat one another with love without regard to differences of sex, rank or race, thereby bringing about a fellowship of moral rectitude"²²³ though he did share Ritschl's view that "the Church could never be wholly identified with the Kingdom of God but rather was a means to an end"²²⁴

It is extremely unlikely that Flint, who was a voracious reader, had not encountered F. W. Maurice's *Kingdom of Christ*, first published in 1838 and revised in 1842. Flint would have agreed with Maurice that Christianity cannot be separated from the world of secular politics, but he would not have accepted Maurice's contention that "there

²¹⁹ Entry on Ritschl in CROSS, F.L., 1858, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, London, p 1168

²²⁰ MACMILLAN, D., *Life of Flint*, p 150

²²¹ Ibid., p 307

²²² RITSCHL, A., 1870, *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, p 20, quoted in LUNDSTROM; G., (Tr Bulman, J) 1963 *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus, A History of interpretation from the last Decades of the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day*, p 5

²²³ Ibid., p 3

²²⁴ M CHAPMAN, "The Kingdom of God and Ethics: From Ritschl to Liberation Theology" in BARBOUR R.S., 1993, *The Kingdom of God and Human Society*, Edinburgh p 147

are two principles, one Christian, one secular, and that the two can never be brought into agreement together; therefore let Christianity claim dominion over all the ordinary, civil affairs of men, and deny the right of the secular principle over any of them”.²²⁵ Flint again would have agreed with Maurice, that “Christ came to establish a Kingdom, not to proclaim a set of opinions”, and that “every man entering this Kingdom becomes interested in all its relations,, circumstances; he cannot separate himself in any wise from them”.²²⁶ He would have emphatically denied Maurice’s fundamental conviction that the Kingdom Christ came to establish was identical with the Church and its signs were the ordinances of religion. “If you ask us”, Maurice wrote, ‘Where are the signs of this Kingdom? What are the proofs of its establishment on the earth?’ We answer you boldly, every Church that you see around you – every baptism to which you bring your children – every sacrament by which you bind yourself, and by which you see others bind themselves to the Head and Lord of the whole body, is a witness of its establishment”.²²⁷

The theme of Christ’s Kingdom on earth was one which inspired the Social Gospel as it developed in the United States. Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) developed a theme of “disinterested benevolence” whereby a person’s conversion from self to God would result through each person’s involvement in the regeneration of social life in the community, and that has echoes in Flint’s conviction that it was through the involvement of Christians in areas of life other than the Church that the Kingdom of God would be brought closer. However, H. Richard Niebuhr concludes that it was the lectures by Samuel Harris – significantly given the same title as Flint’s book on

²²⁵ *The Kingdom of Christ*, quoted in DAVIES; W.M., 1964, *An Introduction to F D Maurice’s Theology*, London, p 123

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ *Christmas Day and other Sermons*, quoted in VIDLER, A.R., 1966, *F.D. Maurice and Company*, London, p 110

the parables – that first expressed and systematised the hopes of the evangelical movement in America for a transformation of social life,²²⁸ and Flint’s book predates Harris’ by a decade.

There is no evidence that Flint encountered an understanding of a Kingdom of God, realisable on earth, in the theological tradition in which he was brought up. At the time when he was studying divinity, the two standard theological textbooks were those by George Hill and Charles Hodge. Alexander Hill was Professor of Divinity at Glasgow when Flint was a student. Hill edited his father George’s *Lectures in Divinity* in 1821 which provided the staple diet of theological training in Glasgow. Hill wrote of the Kingdom in terms very different from those later used by Flint who envisaged the Kingdom of God having an influence “even where it is not closed with as the power of God unto salvation,”²²⁹ “The dispensation of the Gospel is often represented in Scripture under the notion of a Kingdom” Hill wrote, “the Kingdom of Christ; a Kingdom given to him by the Father, in which all power is committed to him and all nations are appointed to do him homage. Those who refuse to submit to him are his enemies, who shall illustrate his glory by the punishment which he will inflict”.²³⁰

The year after Flint delivered his sermons in Aberdeen, the other source of Reformed theological ‘wisdom’, Princeton’s Charles Hodge’s *The True Idea of the Church*, was published in this country, which stated clearly that “The Kingdom of Christ...is not the Church,” though, confusingly, he considers it possible occasionally to regard the two as the same. But Hodge insists, nevertheless, that it is “purely spiritual”. “It was

²²⁸ NIEBUHR, H.R., 1959, *The Kingdom of God in America*, New York, p 160

²²⁹ FLINT, *Kingdom*, p 189

²³⁰ HILL, G., 1833 *Lectures in Divinity*, Edinburgh p 488

to have its seat in the heart – its sovereign being the invisible God in Christ – its laws such as relate to the conscience – its service the obedience of faith – its rewards eternal life....If baptism regenerates, imparts a new spiritual nature, and makes men the children of God, and thus secures for them admission to the Kingdom of God or Church, then of course that Kingdom, in consisting of the baptised, consists of the regenerate”.²³¹

There is a sermon contained in the twenty five volume collected works of Thomas Chalmers “On the Nature of the Kingdom of God”. Chalmers is at pains to point out that the Kingdom of heaven does not only refer to “that place where God sits in visible glory, and where, surrounded by the family of the blessed, he presides in full and spiritual authority”²³² but that “it is often made to attach personally to a human creature on earth”²³³ while the only earthly connection or link which Chalmers envisages is in the intimation or anticipation of the heavenly Kingdom beyond death in the life of the believer.

At the same time as Robert Flint was preaching his sermons on the Kingdom to his congregation in Kilconquhar, the Free Church preacher and social reformer, Thomas Guthrie, each month in 1863 was contributing a series of articles to Norman Macleod’s magazine *Good Words*.²³⁴ Only one of the sermons, on the parable of the leaven, mentions the Kingdom of God in any detail. Here Guthrie says that if the Kingdom is not in the heart it is nowhere. Flint too referred to the Kingdom in the human heart, but, there is no hint in any of Guthrie’s sermons that he envisaged the

²³¹ HODGE, C., 1860, *The True Idea of the Church*, Edinburgh pp 63,64

²³² CHALMERS, T., 1850, *Discourses on the Christian Revelation*, Edinburgh. Discourse V “The Nature of the Kingdom of God” p 300

²³³ Ibid., p 303

²³⁴ Later published as GUTHRIE, T., *The Parable*, Edinburgh (1866)

Kingdom of the heart acting as leaven in society as well on the individual. There is also a rather chilling contrast between a reference to a starving person in Guthrie's sermon on the parable of the sower in *Good Words*, and a similar illustration in one of Norman Macleod's articles three years later, quoted above.²³⁵ Whereas Macleod uses the story about the suicidal man to illustrate the power of palliative pastoral care, Guthrie is much more concerned with conversion. He describes an old, grey, dying woman "stretched on a pallet of straw, covered only by some scanty, filthy rags, with no fire in the empty chimney and the winter wind blowing in cold and fitful gusts through the broken battered window....It was important to turn to the best account the few remaining sands of life, so I spoke to her of her soul, told her of a Saviour....raising herself on her elbow, with chattering teeth and ravenous look (she) muttered 'I am cold and hungry'. Promising help, I at the same time warned her that there was something worse than cold and hunger. Whereupon, stretching out a naked and skinny arm, with an answer which if it did not satisfy the reason touched the feelings, she said, 'If you were as cold and as hungry as I am, you could think of nothing else.' Guthrie adds "the cares of the world were choking the word".²³⁶

Turning to those in Scotland writing about the Kingdom of God during the period of Flint's career in academic theology, there is little evidence that Flint's understanding of the Kingdom was widely followed. The Presbyterian high Churchman James Cooper flatly contradicted Flint's insistence on the separation of Kingdom and Church by telling a congregation in Forres, "Our Lord's favourite name of the Church is the Kingdom – the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of heaven"²³⁷ In an earlier, sermon, preached when he was minister in East St Nicholas in Aberdeen,

²³⁵ pp 3-7

²³⁶ MACLEOD, N (Ed) 1863, *Good Words*, London, p 682

²³⁷ COOPER, J., 1902, *A united Church for the British Empire*, Forres, p 8

Cooper describes the Church as “the Kingdom which he founded for diffusing his faith and building up his people”.²³⁸ In 1895, Cooper spoke to a Church of England clerical society in Hampshire, and said that we “have known ourselves by no name save that which describes us as part of the one Kingdom and body of the Lord Jesus Christ”.²³⁹ In his introductory lecture as Professor of Church History in Glasgow, Cooper says of the Church “which Christ Jesus loves as a man his own flesh” that it is “the city of God on earth and the Kingdom of Heaven on earth”.²⁴⁰

James Candlish,²⁴¹ Professor of Systematic Theology in the Free Church College in Glasgow, gave the Cunningham lectures in 1884 on the Kingdom of God. He does not accept the view which he attributes to Schleimacher and Schweitzer that what has been traditionally referred to as “the invisible Church” is in fact the Kingdom of God, but he argues that if God’s Kingdom includes more than the functions of the Church, then there should be a similar distinction between the Kingdom of God and the invisible Church, and the Kingdom should embrace more than the those who are complete in Christ and who form the Kingdom of God.²⁴²

He notes that it has often been assumed that the terms “Church” and Kingdom of God” are synonymous;²⁴³ and while, he says, “of late, however, the notions of the Church and the Kingdom of God have been not only distinguished, but by some entirely separated from each other; it has been held to be of great doctrinal

²³⁸ COOPER, J., 1835, *Disestablishment and Disendowment contrary to Holy Scripture*, Aberdeen, p 5

²³⁹ COOPER, J., 1895, *The Revival of Church Principles*, London, p xx

²⁴⁰ COOPER, J., 1898, *The Church Catholic and National*, Glasgow, p 4

²⁴¹ Son of the Disruption figure Robert Candlish. James Candlish defended Robertson Smith and is described as “one of the outstandingly great Calvinistic theologians of the 19th century.

²⁴² CANDLISH, J., 1884, *The Kingdom of God*, p 203

²⁴³ Ibid., p 200

significance to maintain the distinction”,²⁴⁴ Candlish himself agrees with Flint that they are not identical. However he does not go as far as Flint in asserting the primacy of the Kingdom of God. Neither Church nor Kingdom can supercede the other “as some in modern times are disposed to discard the doctrine of the Church invisible for that of the Kingdom. Both have a solid foundation in the New Testament; but as the one is a religious and the other a moral notion, the doctrine of the Church invisible is necessary to preserve its truly Christian character, while the idea of the Kingdom of God has its chief value and use in affording an adequate category under which to unfold the body of Christian duty”.²⁴⁵ In a passage which echoes Flint’s understanding of the breadth of the Kingdom of God in relation to the Church, Candlish writes “The distinction is not that the Church is external, and the Kingdom of God spiritual, for each has both characters; but that the Church describes the disciples of Christ in their character as a religious society, the Kingdom of God as a moral society. The special functions of the Church are the exercises of worship, and have to do with the relation of men to God; those of the Kingdom of God are the fulfilment of the law of love, the doing of the will of God in all departments and relations of human life”.²⁴⁶ When Candlish describes the Kingdom of God as not simply one in which people combine to realise the expression of God’s righteousness but one in which people are united to God, it is not clear whether he envisages that unity with God as being a conscious unity, which would exclude Flint’s understanding of the Kingdom of God at work amongst those who would not acknowledge it.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p 201

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p 205

²⁴⁶ Ibid., pp 205-6

Candlish's colleague in the Free Church College in Glasgow, the New Testament scholar A. B. Bruce also published a book on the Kingdom of God: one which brought him into conflict with the Free Church the year following its publication in 1889, mainly because in it he repeated a conviction he had earlier expressed in *The Miraculous Elements in the Gospels*,²⁴⁷ that the Gospels were not inerrant.

Bruce regards the Kingdom of God as an ideal, "like Plato's Republic"²⁴⁸ to be realised nowhere on this earth. But because Christianity always works indirectly, through idealism, there is always a tendency to overlook the impetus to social improvement in the teaching of Christ. Bruce is as determined as Flint to separate in practice the Kingdom of God from the ecclesiastical world. There is no merit in "mere ecclesiasticism"²⁴⁹ "I certainly believe that there are many more unpolished diamonds hidden in the Churchless mass of humanity than the respectable Church-going part of the community has any idea of. I am even disposed to think that a great and steadily increasing portion of the moral worth of society lies outside the Church, separated from it not by godlessness but by exceptional moral earnestness".²⁵⁰ Bruce regard the Church and the Kingdom of God as two "categories" which do not entirely coincide, even when the Church is at its highest and best. Like Flint he regards the Kingdom as "the larger category". Like Flint also, he insists that the Kingdom of God includes many outside the community of faith, though he uses a global reference rather than Flint's reference to the work of legislators and artists in society to make the point. The Kingdom, he says "embraces all who by the key of a true knowledge of the historical Christ are admitted within its portals; but also many more, the

²⁴⁷ BRUCE, A B., 1886, *The Miraculous Elements in the Gospels*, London

²⁴⁸ BRUCE, A B., 1890, *The Kingdom of God*, 3rd Edition, Edinburgh, p 58

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p 272

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p 144

children of the Father in every land who have unconsciously loved the Christ in the person of his representatives, the poor, the suffering, the sorrowful”.²⁵¹ Should the visible Church fail to be true to its calling, then it will disappear “leaving the spirit of Christ free room to make a new experiment, under happier auspices, at self-realisation”.²⁵²

After some years as a parish minister in Crieff and then as Professor of Systematic Theology in the University of Aberdeen, William P. Paterson succeeded Flint as professor of divinity in Edinburgh in 1903, and he most clearly followed his former teacher in his teaching about the Kingdom of God. In a paper on “The Vocation of the Church”, delivered to the first Church of Scotland Congress in 1899, at which Flint himself was a speaker,²⁵³ Paterson states at the outset that “the end of the Church, expressed in most general terms, is the advancement of the Kingdom of God”. But he immediately qualifies that statement by saying, in language very similar to Flint’s, that there are other institutions, such as the family, schools and the state which are also instruments for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.²⁵⁴ Paterson is particularly critical of the idea, often expressed by James Cooper, that the Church exists to continue the role of Christ as prophet, priest and king. To carry out the orders of the king is not to rule, nor is a prophet’s mouthpiece a prophet.²⁵⁵

It is in its social involvement, Paterson says, that the Church continues Christ’s spiritual mission, and like Flint he does not regret that the Church’s historic mission

²⁵¹ Ibid., pp 265-5.

²⁵² Ibid., p 272

²⁵³ See below p xx **TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION**

²⁵⁴ REID, H.M.B., *Official Report of Proceedings of the First Church Congress*, Edinburgh, 1899, p

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²⁵⁵ Ibid., p 31

to care for the poor and needy, which was often fulfilled by organisations the Church either created, or inspired, has been taken over by secular agencies. Paterson distinguishes between agencies for the relief of the poor and the upkeep of hospitals, which the Church had directly created, and other areas of social concern, like the provision of sick pay or the reform of housing conditions, where he believes the Church's message had inspired secular involvement. The growth of secular agencies involved in social reform is less a matter for regret than for "thankfulness that she has educated the State, with its more adequate resources, to admit, at least in an elementary form, the responsibility for the relief of the poor".. Paterson applauds the fact that the state, whose conscience has been educated by the Church, now regulates working hours, and protests vigorously against circumstances "where the material environment of a part of the population is recognised to be such as to render human beings practically inaccessible to her spiritual ministry, or where the conditions under which the work of the world is done are such as to make a Christian life a virtual impossibility". It is the Church's duty to inform the civic conscience and so educate the state "to make use of its power, its wisdom, and its resources for the advancement of the Kingdom of God."²⁵⁶

Flint's continuing teaching on the Kingdom of God

Flint's views on the Kingdom of God were not ones he modified on mature reflection. He expressed them frequently throughout his career, and often in identical ways. There are three sources which enable his continuing interest in and reflection on the Kingdom of God to be traced: first, there are Flint's papers in Edinburgh University Library containing his lectures; secondly, there are references to the Kingdom of God

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p 36

in three of his published works apart from *Christ's Kingdom on Earth: Socialism* (1894), *Sermons and Addresses* (1899), *On Theological, Biblical and Other Subjects* (1905); and thirdly there are the records of various conferences and congresses which were conducted by the Church of Scotland at which Flint was an invited speaker.

Flint's Lecture Notes

While it is clear from the lecture notes on the Kingdom of God that Flint relied very heavily on material from 1865 book of sermons, there is a lecture in the New College Library collection on the Kingdom which appears to be a new introduction to the theme.²⁵⁷ In this lecture, Flint begins by stressing the view which he expressed so forcibly in *Christ's Kingdom upon Earth*, that Kingdom and Church are neither co-terminous nor of equal importance. He says the fact that Jesus made many references to the Kingdom, compared to his very few references to the Church indicates that the Church and its teachings are to be derived from his teaching on the Kingdom, and that any theology which emphasises the priority of the Church is out of keeping with the spirit and emphasis of Jesus' teaching. The Sermon on the Mount, Flint goes on to say, describes the Kingdom of God as an essential present power in the life of the religious man, primarily expressed in certain graces, and, being therefore spiritual, cannot either be defended or defeated by the weapons of this world.

The Kingdom of God in heaven and on earth are one, and the Kingdom in heaven can only be entered through the Kingdom on earth. Interestingly, Flint says that it is the Kingdom (and not as in Matthew's Gospel,²⁵⁸ the Church) against which the gates of

²⁵⁷ MSS H9 FLI 3

²⁵⁸ Matthew 16:18

hell will not prevail. Repeating his argument for the development and growth of the Kingdom from primeval times. Flint says that it is

incomparably more comprehensive than any earthly Kingdom has ever been or can be. It can be traced in the earliest operations of God's Spirit in the history of humanity; it extends to all the spheres and phases of life; it transcends all limits of race and language, of times and space; it advances uninterruptedly onwards....Christianity has come to bring heaven to earth, to raise earth to heaven, and to unite heaven and earth under the one true spiritual government through obedience to which alone can the soul rightly and harmoniously accomplish the ends of its being.²⁵⁹

So, in this introductory lecture, Flint is indicating his basic understanding of the Kingdom: that it is not to be confused with the Church, that it is of the earth as well as heaven, and that it is advanced through the work and commitment of individuals who are infused with the spirit of Christ.

The Church "may not lay its commands upon other institutions, as if it belonged to the Kingdom of God and they not, but has to teach them that, by right if not in fact, they belong to the Kingdom of God, as much as itself, that thus awakening them – art literature, science, commerce, Government – to a sense of their true dignity, of their high vocation, they may walk worthy of it".. In this, again, Flint is repeating the significant passage of his 1865 sermons.

²⁵⁹ Flint Papers, Gen 652

When Flint lectured in Edinburgh on the parables of the Kingdom, he largely followed both the form and substance of the sermons he published in 1865, though there were alterations. In his lecture on the parable of the sower, Flint omitted a long section in which he dealt with the meaning he found in the different kinds of soil onto which the seed fell. The effect of this is to focus more sharply on the idea that in the parable the different types of soil represent different types of receptiveness rather than expanding on what these different types of receptiveness might be, and also to stress that the division of people absolutely into the good and the evil is unwarranted, and that there are differing levels of good and evil in all. Nevertheless Flint says that the parable describes a fundamental difference between good and evil, and so, even if worldly men may appear to be good and valuable as men of faith, the difference in motivation between the two is vital, and the difference in motivation lies in receptiveness to the Gospel.

Flint's lecture on the parable of the sower as compared to his 1865 published sermon indicates sensitivity to a the possible charge that his refusal to identify the Kingdom of God with the Church had created the impression that those of a secular disposition and vision, whom he had harnessed in the service of the Kingdom, were on an equal footing in the sight of God with those whose motivation stemmed from the imperatives of the Gospel. That suspicion is perhaps confirmed by a significant alteration between the text of Flint's sermon on the parable of the mustard seed and his lecture on the subject. In the sermon, Flint speaks very eloquently of how just as what changed the landscape of this country from "putrid morasses and gloomy forests" was human labour, so advances in social order, civil liberties, science,

industry and religion require human effort,²⁶⁰ but this section is omitted from his lectures, possibly because, although in the sermon Flint says that the Gospel grows by a life of its, own, his stress on human involvement laid him open to a charge of detracting from divine inspiration and activity.

In his lecture on the parable of the wheat and the tares. Flint makes one significant departure from the text of his sermon on the subject. He repeats the points he made that God and Satan are in conflict over the field of the world, and that the wheat and tares are people not doctrines. However, when he repeats the sermon's statement that the Kingdom of God is where good seed is sown,²⁶¹ not a mixture of wheat and tares, in his lectures he says that this shows that the Kingdom of God, which is where pure seed is sown, cannot be confused with the visible Church, which is made up of the good and the evil, the elect and the unelect, and he says to his students what he did not say to his congregations, that "it is amazing how St Augustine, Luther and Calvin, and hosts of commentators should....have insisted that Christ meant that the field is the Church, and should have been surprised when they were reminded that 'the world' is not 'the Church'".²⁶² In his lectures, Flint is sharpened the focus on the difference between Kingdom and Church.

Comparing Flint's sermon on the parable of the leaven with his lecture on it, there is a small, but very significant alteration in wording. In both, Flint says that "the Kingdom of God is in the heart like leaven hid in meal". in the sermon, he says that "the doctrine of the Cross is indeed in a heart as leaven in meal....you cannot see it. You cannot touch it. It ferments within, concealed from feeble human sense.; a secret

²⁶⁰ FLINT, *Kingdom*, p 162

²⁶¹ Ibid., p 136

²⁶² Flint Papers, Edinburgh University Library, Box 688 Notebook page 3

power of life at the centre of the soul; a silent unobtrusive power slowly but surely working its way outwards”.²⁶³ However in his lectures, Flint makes the subject of this secret, silent, unobtrusive power not the doctrine of the Cross but the Christian life. There is no evidence at all that the evangelical emphasis in Flint’s preaching, which he demonstrates in his sermons on the parables of the treasure hid in a field and the pearl of great price, decreased at all, but changing the analogy in the leaven from the “doctrine of the cross” to “the Christian life” is consistent with Flint’s emphasis that there is considerable significance in stressing a distinctively Christian element in the life of the Kingdom. It is tempting to ask whether Flint substituted “the Christian life” for “the doctrine of the Cross” hidden in the human heart because the idea of a hidden doctrine of the Cross is reminiscent of Luther’s *theologia cruce*s, hidden from philosophical enquiry. That connection might have led to the conclusion that Flint embraced Luther’s idea of two Kingdoms.

In his lecture on the parable of the leaven, Flint omits from his sermon text a long introduction to an important passage in which he argues with an imaginary critic, who says he has no interest in the effect of the Kingdom on society for what matters is its effect on the soul.²⁶⁴ The effect of this again, as with the alteration from “the doctrine of the cross” to “the Christian life”, is to strengthen the parable’s emphasis in the lectures on the effect of the Kingdom on society in comparison to the emphasis in the sermon which maintains more of a balance between the Kingdom’s effect on the individual and the community to which the individual belongs.

²⁶³ Ibid., pp 172-3

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p 182

The Kingdom of God in Flint's later published work

Robert Flint's major publications in the years following his appointment to the chair of divinity at Edinburgh in 1876 were his two series of Baird lectures, on *Theism* (1877) and *Anti Theistic Theories* (1879) and his biography of Giovanni Battista Vico in 1884, and the following year *Socialism*. Flint's study of socialism²⁶⁵ was based on a series of eight articles he wrote for the magazine *Good Words*, published in 1890-91. At that time, *Good Words* was edited by Norman Macleod's younger brother, Donald. The articles themselves originated in a series of lectures Flint gave to working men in Edinburgh some years earlier.

Where in the sermons on *Christ's Kingdom upon Earth*, and in his Edinburgh University lectures students Flint was general in his handling of the Kingdom of God, in *Socialism* he is much more specific about what he regards as the appropriate contributions of Church, clergy and Christians to the Kingdom of God, which he stresses once more "is not identical or coextensive with the Church".²⁶⁶ He is particularly critical of what he regards as the socialists' belief that the Kingdom of heaven can be established on earth by reorganising the means of production, distribution and exchange,²⁶⁷ and their assumption that the advancement the Kingdom of heaven on earth can begin in the external world and not, as Flint always maintained, in the human heart.²⁶⁸

Flint is convinced that the Church is the most powerful social agency in the world, and that no social evil could resist it if the whole Christian community were to

²⁶⁵ FLINT, R., 1895, *Socialism*, Edinburgh

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p 471

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p 351

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p 378

commit itself to the Church's social mission. It is therefore the specific role of the clergy to remind Christian communities of their call to social mission,²⁶⁹ which, particularly, is to address the issue of the unequal distribution of wealth which industrialisation has exacerbated.²⁷⁰ Rather than seeing manual labourers in Marxist terms as being oppressed and defrauded of the rewards of their productive power, Flint regards them as never before so conscious of the value of their labour and their contribution to society: so much so that there is a danger of unreasonable claims being made.²⁷¹ He questions, however, whether a minister ought to use the pulpit to propound his views on social and economic questions because "the Gospel does not contain solutions of these problems (and) those who pretend that it does make claims on its behalf which can only tend to discredit it".²⁷² As we shall see this is a view which was widely held by some of those within the United Free Church in the early 20th century who wanted to restrict the areas of public policy on which ministers might comment. Flint specifically advises the clergy to observe neutrality in industrial disputes, and advises caution in intervening in them.²⁷³ The Gospel lays down general principles from which pulpit comment on any social question is always appropriate,²⁷⁴ but Flint warns against imagining that these principles encourage uncritical support for working class causes. On the other hand he warns equally that those who use the Church for unwarranted social control or to bolster class interests are farthest of all from the Kingdom of God.²⁷⁵ Flint concludes that

the Church is bound to do her utmost to make the State moral and

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p 472

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p 474

²⁷¹ Ibid., pp 475, 476

²⁷² Ibid., p 477

²⁷³ Ibid., p 487

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p 480

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p 485

Christian. This requires her to maintain her own independence; to take no part in questions of merely party politics; to keep free if possible from the very suspicion of political partisanship; and to confine her efforts, when acting within the political sphere, to endeavouring to get the law of her Lord honoured and obeyed in national and public life. She must be subject or bound to no party, but rise above all parties, in order that she may be able to instruct, correct and rebuke them all with disinterestedness and effectiveness.²⁷⁶

Four years after *Socialism* was published, Flint produced a collection of his sermons and addresses,²⁷⁷ delivered over the previous twenty years, and many of them continue to stress aspects of the Kingdom of God on earth which Flint had introduced in *Christ's Kingdom upon Earth*. The most noteworthy references to the Kingdom of God comes in a sermon he preached in St Giles' Cathedral during the General Assembly of 1881. As has already been noted, one of Flint's constant themes was that Jesus spoke so little about the Church and so frequently of the Kingdom, that the doctrine of the Church must emerge from the doctrine of the Kingdom. It is highly significant that when invited to preach before the General Assembly this theme occupied an important part of the sermon. "The Church" he told the commissioners to the Assembly "exists solely for the sake of the Kingdom; it accomplishes its end only in the measure in which it extends and builds up the Kingdom of God on earth. To identify it with the Kingdom is to confound the means with the end – to disregard the very letter of Christ's teaching – to contradict its whole spirit and character – and to

²⁷⁶ Ibid., pp 491, 492

²⁷⁷ FLINT R., 1899, *Sermons and Addresses*, Edinburgh

deny His real claims to kingship”.²⁷⁸ In another sermon preached in St Giles’ on the occasion of the meeting of the first General Council of the Presbyterian Alliance in 1877, Flint tells the international gathering that social questions are more important than ecclesiastical ones,²⁷⁹ and that Church unity is something which ought not to be “striven for” but should emerge through the principle of growth, by which it reflect the principle at the heart of the Kingdom of God.²⁸⁰ In a sermon to which Flint attaches no specific date or occasion, he repeats his view that God’s Kingdom is not a matter of “Churchly organisation” but consists of the Christian characteristics of humility, meekness and hatred of sin.²⁸¹ The Christian must subordinate everything to the one great cause, the coming Kingdom of God.²⁸² In a sermon preached in St Cuthbert’s Edinburgh during the General Election campaign of 1894, Flint said that the only consideration for a Christian in discharging his duty of voting must be the contribution a candidate might be expected to make towards the advancement of the Kingdom of God.²⁸³ He used a sermon to the National Association for the Advancement of Art to repeat his favourite view, that the contribution of art and the artist has considerable social significance, and as such it advances the Kingdom of God.²⁸⁴ Preaching in St Leonard’s Church in St Andrews, about Martha and Mary, Flint reiterated his conviction that “the one thing needful”²⁸⁵ is for each individual, “undismayed by opposition and unwearied by failure, to advance, each of us in our own sphere, that Kingdom of God, which is righteousness and peace and joy”.²⁸⁶

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p 52

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p 14

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p 25

²⁸¹ Ibid., p 152

²⁸² Ibid., p 194

²⁸³ Ibid., p 262.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p 34, 36

²⁸⁵ St Luke, 10:42

²⁸⁶ FLINT, R., *Sermons and Addresses.*, p 129.

After his retiral in 1902, Flint published a collection of academic papers.²⁸⁷ One of these papers, deals with “Christ our King”,²⁸⁸ and consists entirely of material he had already published about the nature of the Kingdom. Another, “Christ’s teaching as to the Kingdom of God” attempts in more detail than Flint had elsewhere done, to examine the concept of the Kingdom of God from a biblical perspective. He points out that Jesus did not provide a formal definition of the Kingdom, but did regard it as necessary to point to the characteristics of the Kingdom, which Flint says are the surrender of an individual to the will of God, repentance and faith. Jesus teaching about the Kingdom was original in three respects: the Kingdom was connected to Jesus’ own messianic consciousness, he revealed God as Father, and his miracles showed the nature of the Kingdom.

These two papers provide evidence that Flint continued to regard the Kingdom as an important topic to be dealt with, but neither of them add anything to what Flint had already published, and the latter paper is, for someone of Flint’s theological originality, remarkably cautious and conservative in its approach to biblical scholarship. He was, of course, suspicious of “higher criticism” and advised divinity students that “it is not the work of the Christian minister to discuss in the pulpit, and before people who cannot possibly judge of them with adequate knowledge, the hypotheses debated in the schools of biblical criticism”.²⁸⁹ Even so it is remarkable, for example, that over twenty years after the Free Church scholar Robertson Smith questioned whether Jesus’ attributing the authorship of the Pentateuch to Moses was sufficient grounds for accepting it, Flint does so without reservation, and that his somewhat pedestrian references to Mark’s messianic secret being to avoid confusion

²⁸⁷ FLINT, R., 1905, *On Theological, Biblical and other Subjects*, Edinburgh.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 218-242

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p 115

with more triumphalist messianic expectations takes no account of Wrede and his work with which Flint would have been familiar. These papers, however, show that Flint continued to regard his views on the Kingdom of God as requiring constant restatement. They show that while the main aspects of the Kingdom of God, which he drew out in *Christ's Kingdom on Earth*, and in his lectures, were repeated, there were aspects of them to which he devoted greater explication, and which he occasionally refined.

The fact that Flint continued to rehearse his views on the Kingdom of God in works like his *Sermons and Addresses* (1899) and *n Theological, Biblical and Other Subjects* (1905) was important because, as we shall see, in the opening years of the twentieth century there was considerable debate within the United Free Church about the nature of the Kingdom of God and the part the Church's involvement in social affairs might be expected to contribute towards the advance of the Kingdom. Flint's continued treatment of the Kingdom of God in his later published work provides one academic context within which the United Free Church's debate was conducted.

The Kingdom of God in Flint's Contributions to Church Conferences

Another aspect of that context was the contribution Robert Flint made to two major conferences towards the end of the nineteenth century, which also enabled Flint to rehearse his view on the Kingdom of God. Although he was not a member of the Scottish Church Society, Flint was asked in 1894 to speak to its conference on the subject of the Church's duty to study social questions. He says that this duty derives from the truths which the Church was instituted to inculcate: first the sovereignty of God, which involves the law of God in Christ underlying all secular law, for it is

God's sovereignty which guarantees freedom for people; and second, the fatherhood of God which results in the brotherhood of man; and third, the moral law, which protects the individual in society by avoiding the opposite extremes of individualism and socialism.²⁹⁰ While the Church has always has a duty to study social questions, Flint says its importance for his day must be stressed because of civil unrest and discontent. In 1893, the year before this Conference was held, there had been a National Coal Strike, and the year of the Conference itself saw the depression of the agricultural industry in the country reach its lowest point. Because spiritual force is stronger than material force, the state cannot do more than, or even as much as the Church can do, and thus the principles of religion and morality which the Church exists to promote will eventually be dominant within the state.²⁹¹ "There can be no doubt that the Church should do more than she is doing for the solution of social and labour questions than at present, in the sense that she ought to do her duty better, present the Gospel with greater fullness and power, push on her Home Mission work with increased zeal, strive more earnestly to diffuse among all classes the spirit of Christian love and brotherhood, and exemplify more perfectly the beauty of that spirit".²⁹² Flint continues to make it clear that the Church's duty to study social questions and promote social wellbeing is in order to "show forth a Kingdom of God which is both in heaven and on earth"²⁹³ Flint issues a warning, however: "The preachers of past days, perhaps, erred by laying almost exclusive stress on the Kingdom of God in heaven. The preachers of the present day may err by laying too exclusive stress on the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, and so leading some to believe that the secularist Socialists may be right, and that there may be no other

²⁹⁰ *Scottish Church Society Conferences, 1st Series*, Edinburgh, 1894, pp 68-70

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p 66

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p 71

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p 69

heaven than one which men can make for themselves here”. That warning may result from Flint’s vigorous opposition to socialism, which as Donald Smith points out he defines as “any theory of social organisation which sacrifices the legitimate liberties of individuals to the will or interests of the community”,²⁹⁴ and Smith adds caustically “Obviously, if readers were prepared to accept that definition of socialism, they too had to condemn it as Flint proceeded to do in the remaining 450 pages of his book”. It is certainly a warning which would have commended itself to the views represented by the Scottish Church Society. It is significant, however, that Flint was by last decade of the century prepared to modify, however mildly, his previously rather unqualified enthusiasm for the preaching of the Kingdom of God on earth.

In 1899, Flint spoke at the first of three official Congresses which the Church of Scotland held between 1889 and 1904. His subject was the attitude of the Church to social and economic movements, and he begins once more, using material from *Christ’s Kingdom upon Earth*, to describe the Kingdom of God as the underlying and unifying idea in both Old and New Testaments, and to stress again that the Church exists for the advancement of the Kingdom of God, and is not to be confused with it.²⁹⁵ Poverty is an evil, and, Flint claims, “as it is always largely remediable, society should do its best to remove it”.²⁹⁶ Neither money itself, nor wages, will solve the social problem because economic conditions depend on getting the prior intellectual, moral and social conditions right.²⁹⁷ Were the Church more sympathetic to the social problem “the Kingdom of God would assuredly make a wonderful advance”.²⁹⁸ Flint appeals for the Church to support other bodies which aim at tackling destitution,

²⁹⁴ FLINT, R., 1894 *Socialism*, p 17, quoted in SMITH, *Passive Obedience*, p293

²⁹⁵ REID, H.M.B., *Official Report of Proceedings of the First Church Congress*, pp 77-8

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p 81

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p 82

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p 85

alleviating suffering and healing disease. Specifically he asks that Churches might devote some of their offerings to these bodies.²⁹⁹ He gives his endorsement to movements such as savings banks, life insurance companies, friendly societies, co-operatives in industry and the trades unionism, which, “despite errors and evils it may have been responsible for” is a necessity.³⁰⁰ Although Flint’s understanding of the Kingdom of God was original, it is open to a number of criticisms

First, there seems to be an element of confusion and contradiction in Flint’s handling of the themes of Church and Kingdom. Flint wants to insist that in advancing the cause of the Kingdom of God, the Church has the solution to the social problem, while at the same time acknowledging not only that the social problem is extremely complex, but that, on his own understanding of the Kingdom, other institutions than the Church have a contribution to make to it. He says, on the one hand, “The social question is a vast complex of questions, yet it is a complex unity, a vast organic whole of more or less dissimilar parts. Social problems cannot be solved without reference to one another, because society itself, as St Paul so clearly realised, does not consist of disconnected individuals, but is, like the human body, a whole composed of many members and functions intimately conjoined and wisely co-ordinated with reference to a common end”.³⁰¹ In the light of that complexity, Flint recognises that the Kingdom of God similarly involves diverging in its responses to the complexity of social problems. Thus he describes “the Christian answer – Christ’s own answer –” as “Strive in all ways that God’s Kingdom may ever increasingly come in all directions”.³⁰² Elsewhere in his address, Flint stresses the multi-faceted nature of the

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p 89

³⁰⁰ Ibid., p 91-92

³⁰¹ Ibid., p 84

³⁰² Ibid

social problem which he says “is a religious one, but it is also an economic, political, moral and educational one; by no means merely a religious one, but inclusive of all secular agencies, institutions and movements”.³⁰³ Such a view also corresponds to Flint’s conviction that “the Kingdom of God being thus comprehensive, the attitude of the Church to all movements for the amelioration of man’s lot should correspond to it”.³⁰⁴ However, on the other hand, in the same address, Flint uses the term “comprehensiveness” in a much more exclusive way.

The Church has had clearly revealed to her in broad and definite outlines, although not in details, the true and only comprehensive solution of the social question. And from that of itself it immediately follows that she has a social mission of immense importance in the world, and cannot, without plain violation of duty, feel indifferent to, or stand wholly aloof from, any social movements, for they all tend either to promote or retard the advance of the Kingdom of God, and in so far as they do one or the other, call either for her co-operation or her opposition. *Her responsibility in this connection is all the greater, because the solution of the social problem revealed to her is not one solution among many, but is the solution, the one which excludes nothing that is true, and includes nothing that is false, in other solutions which have been proposed.*³⁰⁵ [my emphasis]

That seems remarkably like insisting that other solutions, political, economic, social, are of value inasmuch as they match the religious solution which, as Flint puts it, “is not one solution among many, but is the solution”. This tension can only be avoided

³⁰³ Ibid., p 83

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p 85

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p 80

by avoiding the insistence that the religious solution is exclusively the solution. In his sermon on the parable of the treasure hid in a field, which, together with his sermon on the pearl of great price are by far the most evangelical of his sermons, he speaks of these parables describing “the Kingdom of heaven as it is not to all men, but to those only who really find it – who come into possession not merely of some of its benefits, but into possession of itself”. This is a clear indication that ultimately Flint equated the expression of the Kingdom with Christian conviction, and the contribution to it of those secular agencies as secondary.

There is another area of confusion with regard to whether Flint sees the Kingdom of God as having an objective reality or whether it is a way of describing subjective religious motivation. In his references to the Kingdom of God, Flint seems at times to be describing an objective reality. In the critical passage already referred to, the Kingdom has an independent nature which is capable of being “established” by legislators, poets, traders and artists. Flint tells the first Church Congress that “when houses of one apartment have ceased to be, God’s Kingdom will have made in our land a very perceptible advance”.³⁰⁶ The Kingdom, like leaven “pervades and improves society by its own inherent virtue”³⁰⁷ When Flint insists that the Church and the Kingdom are to be kept separate, that separation implies that each has an existence similar to the other, and when he outlines the consequences of ensuring that the Kingdom and Church are kept separate (see above) these consequences reinforce that impression. However, Flint also refers to the Kingdom in terms that make it seem little more than another way of describing the motivation of the Christian active

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p 90

³⁰⁷ FLINT, *Kingdom*, p187

in Church and society. The Kingdom “works in the heart of the individual”,³⁰⁸ even in those who are not committed to the Gospel, and any change in society is produced “by a complete change on the human heart”.³⁰⁹ Throughout his sermons on the parables of the sower and the tares, Flint insists that the categories used in these parables refer to individuals.

Third, while Flint insists that the Kingdom and the Church are not the same, it is not always clear what the difference is. He insists that any progress the Church makes is not necessarily evidence that the Kingdom has advanced, and, conversely, that the Kingdom has been advancing as the Church’s power has declined.³¹⁰ While Flint can trace in some detail how first the state, and then science and literature and the arts freed themselves from ecclesiastical control,³¹¹ it is not at all clear in what way these agencies gaining their freedom from the Church has, correspondingly led to the Kingdom of God advancing, other than that “before their independence they were related to the Kingdom of God only through their connection with the Church; now, since their independence, they may justly claim to be portions of the Kingdom of God, each one of them as much apportion of it as the Church itself. The extent to which they are a portion of the Kingdom of God is left unclear with only the general comment expressed that “when their aims are good and holy, they are no less of the Kingdom of God than (the Church) is”.³¹²

In his sermon on the parable of the mustard seed, Flint sees evidence of the Kingdom’s growth in the Church’s numerical expansion since the first day of

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p 181

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p 189

³¹⁰ Ibid., p 65

³¹¹ Ibid., pp 65-68

³¹² Ibid., p 70

Pentecost.³¹³ He outlines his understanding of the development of the Kingdom of God in terms of its evolution, but when he traces its evolution he refers to “the evolution of doctrines” and “systems of theological science”.³¹⁴ The evolution of the Kingdom of God is traced through the Church’s doctrinal development. And Flint uses the descriptions “outward” and visible”, conventionally used in the distinction between the visible and the invisible Church, to apply to the Kingdom of God,³¹⁵ and he expands on this by saying that “every subsequent period (from the time of the New Testament) has presented to us the same mingling of hypocrites and believers”.³¹⁶ Once more he uses the terminology of the Church to describe the content of the Kingdom.

Conclusion

If Flint had not consistently quoted from *Christ’s Kingdom upon Earth* throughout his career, and repeatedly returned to the arguments he advanced in it in publications and addresses in the subsequent fifty years, it would be unfair to quote from it as evidence of Flint’s mature thought. The fact that he does make so much use of his first publication is not only evidence that he retained the views it contained throughout his life, but also evidence that he does not seem to have taken account of biblical scholarship’s attention to the Kingdom of God in the years since Flint first wrote about it.³¹⁷ The germ of Flint’s more widely studied philosophy of history was contained in *The Kingdom of Christ upon Earth*. His view of the Kingdom of God is essential to his thinking if, according to his philosophy of history, Flint is not to

³¹³ Ibid., p 159

³¹⁴ Ibid., p 164

³¹⁵ Ibid., p 125

³¹⁶ Ibid., p 127

³¹⁷ In particular W Baldensperger’s *Das Selbstbewusstsein Jesu im Lichte der messianischen Hoffnungen seiner Zeit* (1888) and J Weiss *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (1892).

regard the diminishing power and influence of the Church in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Scotland as evidence of God's will. In a passage which has been noted by A.P.F. Sell³¹⁸ and the contemporary theologian John Hick³¹⁹ Flint wrote in his first series of Baird lectures

Due weight ought also to be given to the circumstance that the system of God's moral government of our race is only in course of development. We can see but a small part of it, for the rest is as yet unevolved. History is not a whole, but the initial or preliminary portion of a process which may be of vast duration, and the sequel of which may be far grander than the past has been. That portion of the process which has already been accomplished, small though it be, indicates the direction which is being taken; it is, on the whole, a progressive movement; a movement bearing humanity towards truth, freedom and justice. Is it scientific, or in any wise reasonable, to believe that the process will not advance to its legitimate goal? Surely not.³²⁰

Flint's biographer quotes a similar passage from his Croall lectures³²¹ in which he describes the philosophical study of history as seeking "to show that the goal of the evolution of life, so far as it has yet proceeded, is the perfecting of human nature, and the eternal source of things a power which makes for truth and righteousness"³²² This understanding of history is entirely consistent with the view of the Kingdom of God which Flint outlined over forty years earlier, when, in his sermon on the parable of the

³¹⁸ Sell, *Defending and Declaring*, pp 60-61

³¹⁹ HICK, J., 1968, *Evil and the God of Love*, London, pp 244--5

³²⁰ FLINT, R., 1877, *Theism*, Edinburgh, pp 258-259

³²¹ MACMILLAN, *Life of Flint*, p 237

³²² FLINT, R., 1903, *Agnosticism*, Edinburgh, 1903

mustard seed, he expressed confidence in the continuous growth of the Kingdom of God.

We may fail to measure its progress from day to day, because it is not rapid but slow, not with observation, but without it. We may be unable to detect that a plant which we looked upon yesterday is larger today than it was then, but a month hence the evidences of increase will probably be abundant – and if not, at least a year hence. Still more may we be unable to trace the growth of the Kingdom of God if we limit our scrutiny to a short period or a narrow one, although a more comprehensive view will clearly show that growth has been going on without interruption. The life to which it is due has remained ever identical with itself, casting off what is false and imperfect, but preserving and unfolding what is true and essential.³²³

It is clear why Flint regards the Church and the Kingdom as separate, and sees the progressive decline of the Church's direct social influence as a corollary of his understanding of the Kingdom. If the entire divine plan were to be thought of as entrusted to the Church, then the progressive decline of its direct influence could only have been regarded as the will of Providence acquiescing in the decline of the agent of Providence's own historic plan.

In an essay on the American Walter Rauschenbusch,³²⁴ often regarded as the classic exponent of the social Gospel, Mark Chapman draws attention to views expressed by

³²³ FLINT, *Kingdom*, pp 166-7

Rauschenbush, which are very similar to those Flint expressed half a century earlier. Just as Flint thought the Kingdom occupied a place far from the centre of contemporary theology, so Rauschenbusch wrote that the concept of the Kingdom had almost “dropped out of Christian vocabulary”. There is an echo of Flint’s understanding of the evolutionary growth of the Kingdom, which inevitably involves divergence of functions in Rauschenbusch’s conviction that the Kingdom gave “grandeur to the scattered and fragmentary purposes of life by gathering them in a single all-comprehending aim”. Flint saw the Kingdom advancing through the individuals inspired by religious faith, as did Rauschenbusch. Both were sceptical of the Church’s claims to be the agent of divine providence, and of socialism’s ignoring of spiritual in its pursuit of economic ends, though both were committed to a redistribution of wealth.

Flint’s contribution to the later understanding of the social Gospel has been underestimated, though he would have argued that the social gospel required a far more rigorous theological context than it was subsequently often given.. However his understanding of the Kingdom of God was to have an influence beyond academic sphere. C.G. Brown has posited that because Chalmers Godly Commonwealth was “outdated, oligarchic, essentially-anti-urban and unworkable”, his successors were forced to transform it into something which would allow for co-operation between church and civic authorities. It was, however, Flint’s understanding of the Kingdom of God which gave these successors the theological framework without which they would have regarded involvement in civil society as a departure from the Church’s

³²⁴ CHAPMAN., M, “Walter Rauschenbush and the Coming of God’s Kingdom” in BARBOUR., R.S., *The Kingdom of God and Human Society*, pp 173-189

proper role. Flint was to provide the model which enabled the successors of Brewster and Burns, Buchanan and Macleod in the west of Scotland to find a place for social,

municipal and statutory responses to the urban crisis within their social theology, The work of Norman Macleod's brother Donald, his successor in the Barony parish in Glasgow, John Marshall Lang, and their colleague in the east end of the city, David Watson depended on new paradigm of the Kingdom of God which Robert Flint had provided

Chapter 3

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE THOUGHT OF DONALD MACLEOD AND JOHN MARSHALL LANG

Introduction

Norman Macleod's younger brother Donald became minister of Park parish Church in 1869, and John Marshall Lang was inducted to the Barony parish in 1873. They were to dominate the ecclesiastical scene in Glasgow during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and play significant roles in the General Assembly.

Donald Macleod was born in 1831 and was almost twenty years younger than Norman. He studied at Glasgow University and, after an assistantship with his older brother in the Barony parish, he was inducted to the borders parish of Lauder in 1858. Four years later he moved to Linlithgow, and then, in 1869 to the Park, near the western extremity of the city, overlooking Kelvingrove Park and Gilmorehill where the new university buildings were nearing completion (they were opened in the year after Macleod's move to Glasgow). Park Church's parish was a prosperous area of wide streets, grand circuses and spectacular views.

In 1886, the population of the Park parish was 7538, 789 people, were communicant members, just less than 10% of the parish population. The Christian liberality of the congregation, (its total givings to the work of the Church) was £3709, the highest in the Presbytery of Glasgow. The nearby congregation of Hillhead was the only other congregation whose Christian liberality exceeded £3000. In 1905, the year Macleod retired, the congregation had grown to 901 communicants, with a Christian liberality

of £5151, the only congregation in the Presbytery whose liberality exceeded £5000. Hillhead's liberality by then had risen to £4189, the only other one over £4000. The stipend paid to Macleod in 1905 was £1000, an astonishingly high figure at a time when the average stipend in the Presbytery of Glasgow was £317³²⁵ Macleod retired from Park Church in 1905, and died in 1909. He had taken over the editorship of *Good Words* when his brother Norman died in 1872 and he remained as editor till his death. From 1890-1895 he was Convener of the General Assembly's Home Mission Committee and he served as Moderator of the Assembly in 1895. Macleod published a volume of sermons in 1893³²⁶ which contain a considerable amount of his social theology, which he popularised through commissioning articles from like-minded people for *Good Words* and in the considerable number of articles which he himself contributed

John Marshall Lang was born in 1834 and studied at Glasgow University with Donald Macleod who described Lang in a fragment of autobiography as "one of my own class fellows".³²⁷ The two men were to become good friends and neighbours, Macleod at 1 Woodlands Terrace and Lang at number 5, and their families saw a good deal of each other. Marshall Lang's son Cosmo, who became Archbishop of Canterbury, said that from his childhood he had a great affection for Donald Macleod.³²⁸ Marshall Lang had succeeded Robert Flint in the East Church of Aberdeen in 1856, but a period of ill health forced him to leave after only two years for the rural parish of Fyvie. In 1865 he moved to the newly established parish of Anderston in Glasgow. After three years there, he became minister of Morningside in Edinburgh, and then, in 1873 of the

³²⁵ Figures taken from the annual *Church of Scotland Yearbook*, first published in 1886.

³²⁶ MACLEOD, D., 1893, *Christ and Society*, London (*Christ and Society*)

³²⁷ SMITH, S., 1926, *Donald Macleod of Glasgow*, London

³²⁸ Ibid pp 152-3

Barony in Glasgow. He oversaw the building of a new Church on a site opposite Glasgow Cathedral. In contrast to the Park, the Barony Parish in 1886 had a population of 27, 475 and a congregation of 1945. Its Christian liberality was £1288. In 1900, when Marshall Lang left the Barony, the congregation had risen in size to 2292 and Lang's stipend was £872.

In 1890 Lang became Convener of the Assembly's commission "to enquire into the religious condition of the people of Scotland", set up at the request of Donald Macleod's Home Mission Committee. His presentation of its annual report "was the great event of successive General Assemblies"..³²⁹ He was Moderator of the Assembly in 1893. In 1900 he was appointed by the Crown as Principal of the University of Aberdeen. Marshall Lang delivered the Baird Lectures in 1901³³⁰ on the role of the Church in society, and, also like Macleod, outlined a social theology in speeches in the courts of the Church.

The publications of the two men which summarise their social theology reveal their debt to Flint. Marshall Lang's Baird Lectures survey the history of the Church's social teaching from Jesus until the author's own day and then examine what for Marshall Lang were the primary social issues: the extent of poverty and socialism and some reactions to them, secular and Christian.

Donald Macleod's understanding of the Kingdom of God is most compactly expressed in the volume of sermons, *Christ and Society*. Five of the sermons are specifically about the Kingdom of God, but there are illuminating references to this

³²⁹ COOPER, J., "John Marshall Lang" in *Dictionary of National Biography*, 2nd Supplement, pp 414-5

³³⁰ LANG, J.M., 1902, *The Church and its Social Mission*, Edinburgh. (*Church and Social Mission*)

conception in several of the others. Macleod's biographer describes *Good Words* under his editorship as "attaining its high water mark of popular interest and prosperity". Initially published by Strahan as a monthly magazine priced sixpence, it was latterly published by Harmsworth as a weekly at twopence before finally being closed down. It was started at a time when Sunday was strictly observed and *Good Words* "carried with it an atmosphere which made it acceptable in homes that demanded 'Sunday reading'. With the ensuing change in the habits of the people, the magazine ceased to have a *raison d'être*".³³¹

Although Macleod and Marshall Lang are frequently linked together as joint representatives of a new attitude within the Church of Scotland towards social reform, the two men were in fact different in their approach. Marshall Lang, for example, was a high Churchman, while Macleod criticised anything that could be described as "ritualism". Marshall Lang saw social conditions in terms of the broadest issues they presented, while Macleod much more in terms of the individuals they affected. While both men analysed and criticised society, and both expressed sympathy for those marginalized in society, Marshall Lang tended to stress the social analysis whereas Macleod vividly described the conditions in which the poor were forced to live. Through the pages of *Good Words*, Macleod addressed a far wider audience than Marshall Lang.

Macleod's and Marshall Lang's links with Flint

Marshall Lang, Donald Macleod and Robert Flint were contemporaries at Glasgow University. Flint's biographer quotes Macleod as saying "Dr Flint and I were at Glasgow College together, but were never class-fellows; he was about three years my

³³¹ SMITH, S., Donald MacLeod of Glasgow p 15

junior, but I came to know him well as he was intimate with several of my student friends who used to gather in the picturesque court of the old university in the High Street”.³³² Marshall Lang and Flint were born in the same year and were closer contemporaries at Glasgow. Flint succeeded Donald Macleod as missionary in the Barony and shortly afterwards became assistant minister there. He was clearly close to the whole Macleod family, and was to give a lecture on Norman MacLeod³³³ in which “his critical spirit is for once in abeyance, and every line pulsates with approval and admiration”.³³⁴ It is significant that while most contemporary assessments of Norman Macleod’s ministry in the Barony single out his parochial organisation, and even describe it as the best organised parish in Scotland, this is an aspect of Norman Macleod’s work which Flint ignores, suggesting a difference of attitude between Flint on the one hand and MacLeod and Marshall Lang, on the other, who were deeply concerned with how mission, evangelism and social care could be expressed through a territorial ministry, on the other. Nevertheless, in Flint’s lecture about him, Norman Macleod’s social concern is singled out for special mention.

In a speech in 1894 Flint referred to Donald Macleod’s recently published *Christ and Society*, coupling it with Brooke Foss Westcott’s earlier *Social Aspects of Christianity*.³³⁵ Flint said that the two works “are greatly more valuable than they would have been if their authors had shown a less exquisite sense of knowing always where to stop; and such a sense, only attainable in due measure by assiduous thoughtfulness, is probably even more necessary in addressing congregations

³³² MACMILLAN *Life of Flint*, p 49

³³³ FLINT, R., 1883 “Norman MacLeod” in *Scottish Divines, St Giles’ Lectures, 3rd series*, Edinburgh

³³⁴ MACMILLAN, *Life of Flint*, p 80

³³⁵ WESTCOTT, B.F., 1887, *The Social Aspects of Christianity*, London.

composed of the poor and labouring classes than those which meet in Westminster Abbey or the Park Church”.³³⁶

As Flint’s successor in the East parish of Aberdeen, Marshall Lang would have been well aware of the impact of his predecessor’s sermons on the Kingdom of God. Flint and Marshall Lang were both members of the General Assembly’s Home Mission Committee under Macleod’s convenership. Flint thus had sufficient links with Donald Macleod and Marshall Lang to justify the presumption that when the two men took up their ministries in Glasgow they were well aware of Flint’s ground breaking work on Christ’s Kingdom on earth.

Although Marshall Lang’s scheme of Baird lectures is very different from that of Robert Flint’s series of sermons, there are a number of similarities. Like Flint, Marshall Lang is extremely critical of socialism both on economic grounds and because it lacks a religious impetus without which both Flint and Marshall Lang believed it was deficient. Twice Marshall Lang acknowledges that he is drawing on arguments advanced by Flint: once when Flint dismissed definitions of socialism such as “every aspiration towards the amelioration of society” as largely meaningless; and again when Flint criticised socialism because “it leaves out of account God and divine law, sees in morality simply a means to generate happiness, and recognises no properly spiritual and eternal life. It conceives of the whole duty of mankind as consisting in the pursuit and production of social enjoyment. Hence its ideal of the

³³⁶ The Scottish Church Society Conferences, 1st Series, 1894 p 70

highest good, and consequently of human conduct, is essentially different from the Christian ideal, and thus it necessarily comes into direct conflict with Christianity”.³³⁷

Just as Flint insisted that when the Gospel changes human hearts then the result is a complete change in society, so Marshall Lang wrote “A regenerated society means regenerated persons; persons with a right spirit in whom there is a supreme power making the life consistent”.³³⁸ Both Flint and Marshall stress the freedom of the individual. Flint argues that science, literature and art had to free themselves from the domination of the Church which had illegitimately asserted its authority over them in defiance of its commitment to freedom. “Protestantism” he claims, “by laying down the principle of private judgment, declared the individual man free – declared the spiritual independence of man of everyone but his God”.³³⁹ Marshall Lang is less inclined to criticise the Church. “Society took the individual in hand and allowed him only so much as it judged to be for the good of the governing classes.....we now recognise that in human nature there is a charter of freedom for everyone and that everyone born into citizenship is entitled to the opportunity of exercising and fulfilling his capacities, intellectual, moral and volitional”.³⁴⁰

Although Marshall Lang’s historical survey of the historical development of the Church’s social theology is considerably deeper than Flint’s, Marshall Lang shares Flint’s view of history that “all that is true and healthy is ever struggling upwards to completer realisation”.³⁴¹ They both share the view, which, as we have seen, Patrick Brewster took too, that the periods when the Church exercised most political power

³³⁷ LANG, *Church and Social Mission*, p 277

³³⁸ Ibid., p 274

³³⁹ FLINT, *Kingdom* p 68

³⁴⁰ LANG, *Church and Social Mission* p 5

³⁴¹ Ibid., p 42

were the times when it was least faithful to its commission, when the Church, as Marshall Lang puts it “in borrowing the clothes of the Empire, exchanged the imperialism of truth for that of worldly power”.³⁴²

Marshall Lang shares with Flint the view that the Kingdom and the Church were not coterminous. He writes that the Kingdom of God “is not an exclusive Church-State. It is not a State with such distinct political outlines that men shall be able to explain ‘Lo, it is there!’ Neither is it a mere hazy cloudland. But it is free from the complications of human governments and ambitions. It is an ethical commonwealth, descending from God out of heaven, that it may pervade and sanctify and enrich all nations and people in all their life. It is to take shape in his Church, though, in its full and proper glory it transcends the Church”. This is hardly as strong as Flint’s (and later Macleod’s) vigorous repudiation of any identification of Church and Kingdom, and Marshall Lang is less enthusiastic in regarding endeavours outside the Church as contributing towards the coming Kingdom. He acknowledges “the motive of much of the humanitarian effort of the day is not a distinctively Christian motive” and that “men and women realise the characteristic forces of religion, (and) find a religion for themselves, in their idealisations, their art, their science, their work”. However he believes that those whose motives are not distinctively Christian are nevertheless unconsciously influenced by Christian thought, and that if they were to make a Christian commitment that would provide a context which would give their scientific and artistic interests a richness, which, without that commitment their secular endeavours lack.³⁴³

³⁴² Ibid., p 83

³⁴³ LANG, Church and Social Mission, p 43

Flint had written that “to set up the Kingdom of God is indeed to plant Churches, but to do vastly more than that – even to alter the whole dispositions and activities of a people,”³⁴⁴ and Marshall Lang too was concerned not with “ecclesiastical constitution and history, but the social service of the Christian collectivism.....the purpose being to indicate the relation of Christian ethics and manifestation of the life of man, or, as otherwise it might be stated, to the betterment of the individual as well as of society”.³⁴⁵

Macleod’s sermons are much more political in content than Marshall Lang’s lectures in that he criticises specific practices like the production of goods cheaply being only possible at the price of low wages, or commercial malpractice. Like Marshall Lang, Macleod recognises that politically the doctrine of *laissez-faire* has been abandoned in the passing of legislation protective of the weak, but he is far more critical of what he sees as economic *laissez-faire*. “Laissez-faire, or in other words, ‘Leave alone, do not interfere, let evils work their own cure’ is but an equivalent for the ‘Survival of the Fittest’ of the Naturalist; and this implies the correlative sinking, suffering, and social destruction of the weakest “.³⁴⁶

Although, along with Flint and Marshall Lang, Macleod attacks socialism for neglecting God and, in its extremer forms, for destroying individual liberty, he is more sympathetic to some of the aims and ideals, and less inclined to see individual liberty as always desirable. “The exaggeration of individual freedom, each unit being

³⁴⁴ FLINT, *Kingdom* p 71

³⁴⁵ LANG, *Church and Social Mission* p 13

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p 197

guided by self-interest, thus leads to a half-concealed warfare, and to the excitement of those passions which warfare of every kind is sure to generate”.³⁴⁷

Macleod is also far more critical of the Church than Marshall Lang. Social theology played a far greater part in Macleod’s overall theological outlook than it did in Marshall Lang’s, and Marshall Lang’s liturgical interests were never shared by Macleod, who constantly attacks what he frequently calls “ecclesiasticism”. “Those very Christians who, within the sphere of ‘religion’ busy themselves with ecclesiasticisms and theologies, or theories and signs of Salvation, have all the while, in other spheres, fought and do fight a continual battle against God, and conduct social, commercial and political life on principles which are in direct antithesis to the laws of Christ’s Kingdom”.³⁴⁸ As well as claiming that society is founded on selfishness, he blames its ills on “Christians who go to Churches and repeat creeds, and are more or less busy about the redemption of their own souls (but) have scarcely ever attempted to bring into play the mighty spiritual powers which God has armed them with, and commanded them to employ; and.....have consistently and continually fought against his laws, and done just the very opposite of what Jesus Christ set forth as the rules of his Kingdom”.³⁴⁹ He insists that “it would be no exaggeration were the words ‘social inequality’ written over the doors of the vast majority of our Protestant Churches, so exclusively do they seem to be reserved for people who are ‘better off’ or those at least who can appear there in ‘Sunday clothes’”.³⁵⁰ In the light of passages such as those quoted, it is remarkable that, given the extremely well-off congregation to whom these sermons were preached, that he could dedicate *Christ*

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p 200-1

³⁴⁸ Macleod, *Christ and Society* p 34

³⁴⁹ Ibid p 35

³⁵⁰ Ibid.,p 47

and Society to his congregation “in affectionate remembrance of a ministry of nearly twenty four years, during which, owing to kindness of its members, not an incident has occurred to mar a harmony characterised by perfect confidence and warm personal friendship”.³⁵¹

Macleod’s references to the Kingdom of God very often reflect themes developed by Robert Flint. Flint introduced the theme of the Kingdom of God as not occupying “in modern religious systems and modern religious life a position similar to the one it holds in the Bible. It is central there, but is very far from being central in contemporary thought and practice”.³⁵² After a brief summary of Jesus’ references to the Kingdom of God in the first sermon specifically on the theme, Macleod echoes Flint’s view. “When we take such a review, however imperfect, of the position which this Kingdom of God occupies in the teaching and claims of Christ, we may well be struck by the contrast which the prevalent tone of modern thought presents. I should say that the doctrine of the Kingdom of God is as markedly absent from ordinary preaching as it is emphatically present in the gospel of Christ”.³⁵³

Macleod’s use of the analogy with evolution and his understanding of historical development are similar to Flint’s. Macleod says that science and religion both testify to progress, as does the history of civilisation towards the attainment of an ideal human society, a movement, as often unconscious as it is conscious, towards the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ Ibid., Dedication

³⁵² FLINT, *Kingdom* p 62

³⁵³ MACLEOD, *Christ and Society* p 69

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p 78

Just as Flint saw that evolutionary growth implied “increasing divergence and definiteness of parts and functions”³⁵⁵ and thus preserved individuality, so Macleod recognises the element of diversity produced by the seed-like principle” of the Kingdom of God, which means that “the individual retains his natural characteristics; he continues to be imaginative or intellectual, clever or the reverse”.³⁵⁶

Both Flint and MacLeod find in the incarnation and the pattern of Jesus’ life the same illustration of a view of the Kingdom they share. Dealing with the parable of the mustard seed³⁵⁷ Flint refers to the “unobtrusiveness of Jesus and his poverty, sorrows and suffering of Jesus as “the little seed-corn which had to be dropped into the ground and die ere the earth could bear a harvest of righteousness and peace.”³⁵⁸ MacLeod says of Jesus that “He had come to bestow a new life, to implant principles, to give vitality to the diviner part that is in man, and through the growth of this life from within, outward confusion would gradually change into order, the law of God would become the law of heart and life, until the glory and goodness which dwelt in Himself would be reflected in humanity, and the reign of God be established in conscience and will”.³⁵⁹ That the two men should use the incarnation as illustrative of the parables in which Jesus referred to the growth of the Kingdom from unpromising beginnings, and as evidence of that principle at the heart of their understanding of the Kingdom of God, it shows Macleod’s considerable dependence on Flint not only in interpreting the Kingdom of God but in sharing a Christological interpretation of the parables.

³⁵⁵ FLINT, *Kingdom* p 163

³⁵⁶ MACLEOD, *Christ and Society* p 87

³⁵⁷ St Matthew Chapter 13 verses 31,32

³⁵⁸ FLINT, *Kingdom* p 157

³⁵⁹ MACLEOD, *Church and Society* p 89

Macleod and Flint also make use of evolution in their understanding of the development of the Kingdom. As already noted, Macleod shares with Flint an understanding of the pervasive effect of the Kingdom of God within society, even where the influence of the Kingdom would not naturally be expected to be found. Flint writes “From first to last, from the beginning of human history until now, the immense majority of our race have set before them ends of their own, narrow and mean schemes merely for personal good; and yet although it has been so, and in the midst of confusion, tumult and war, the progress, order, plan I speak of has been slowly and silently but surely built up”.³⁶⁰ Forty years later Macleod was to write: “The true measure of the advance of his Kingdom, as distinct from any ecclesiasticism, is to be found in the extent to which the spirit of Christ is carried into every sphere of interest and duty. For while modern society is certainly to some extent chargeable with such breaches of Christ’s law as have been sketched, yet were society resolved into its component parts we would discover a great deal that is apparently sincerely religious in the individuals who compose it”.³⁶¹

Just as there are similarities in what Flint and Macleod see in the parables of growth, so in their treatment of the parable of the leaven they both see the same principle involved. Flint says “Leaven changes the nature, yet does not change the substance of the meal. Meal leavened remains meal, but endowed with new properties, and adapted for new uses. It acquires another character, another appearance, another fragrance and taste. So the Gospel does not destroy any inherent power or faculty of the mind, but gives to all its powers and faculties a different character, a new

³⁶⁰ FLINT, *Kingdom* p 56

³⁶¹ MACLEOD, *Christ and Society* p 9

direction”.³⁶² Macleod points out that the leaven “does not destroy the meal but fills it with new properties. The individual retains his natural characteristics; he continues to be imaginative or intellectual, clever or the reverse; but there has been breathed into his nature a new spirit. The society which has similarly been affected may retain art, literature, commerce, politics, but these different spheres of influence become charged with a new moral life, for the generosity, truth, purity and goodness of Christ impart their own nature, even as the leaven gives its flavour to the meal”.³⁶³ The conclusion of that passage is an expansion of what Flint had written about the Gospel imbuing “by its spirit all the laws, institutions and usages of society”.

Despite their differences of view and style, Marshall Lang and Macleod’s social theology owes much to the views of Robert Flint. There are, however, two further views which Marshall Lang and Macleod held firmly, which are entirely dependent on Flint’s insights, and which were crucial for their ministries and for the lead they gave the Church.

Flint insisted that the Kingdom of God and the Church are not co-terminous, and that the Church shares the journey towards the Kingdom of God with other institutions and movements. For Marshall Lang and Macleod these views had become axiomatic. Given that Macleod was so critical of the Church, there was little likelihood that he would confuse the Church with the Kingdom of God, which, he says, “grows with the deepening of the Christian spirit and its increase in society. The Kingdom of God is therefore wider than the Church”. Macleod says. “The rules and institutions which belong to ecclesiastical organisations cannot determine that

³⁶² FLINT, *Kingdom* p 174

³⁶³ MACLEOD, *Christ and Society* p 87

which is the spirit of a society, rather than a system of creeds and observances”.³⁶⁴ Marshall Lang similarly takes the view that “it is the mission of (the) Church to realise on earth” the Kingdom of God,³⁶⁵ though in its life the Church “is a society which should mirror the divine order, the Kingdom of God”.³⁶⁶ The Kingdom of God “is a society with the tokens and characteristics of a society. But it is free from the complications of human governments and ambitions. It is an ethical commonwealth, descending from God out of heaven that it may pervade and sanctify and enrich all nations and peoples”.³⁶⁷

Flint had also insisted that to establish the Kingdom of God is “to alter and transform the whole dispositions and activities of a people. This is not to be done exclusively through the Church,”³⁶⁸ and so he assigned to legislators, poets, artists and others a role in the establishing of the Kingdom of God. In similar vein, Macleod says the Kingdoms of the world are not primarily the political but “the moral forces and interests which bear sway over human life. There is the Kingdom of Commerce, with its penetrating influences, the Kingdom of Science with its vast interests, the Kingdom of Literature, of Art, of Public Opinion, all of which govern in that inner sphere which gives shape to history and character to movements.”³⁶⁹

With as much force as Flint, Macleod harnesses the secular in the cause of the Kingdom of God and condemns the dismissal of contributions towards the Kingdom as “profane” simply because they do not stem from a religious motivation. “Instead

³⁶⁴ Ibid., p 88

³⁶⁵ LANG *Church and Social Mission* p 20

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p 32

³⁶⁷ Ibid, p 28

³⁶⁸ FLINT *Kingdom* p 71

³⁶⁹ MACLEOD *Christ and Society* p 108

of a healthy rejoicing in the good news of the Kingdom, and seeing in the gifts of civilisation tokens of a divine order asserting itself above the chaos of lawless forces, religion has behaved too much like the Pharisee, fencing itself behind traditional, and often purely conventional, distinctions, and standing aloof when it should have fallen gladly into the ranks and led the advance along the whole line of human progress”.³⁷⁰

Quoting St Luke, “the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation”,³⁷¹ Marshall Lang writes that the Kingdom “comes and it is advanced.....through transformations of character, individual and national, effected by the diffusion of those educative, disciplinary and ameliorative influences which tone and determine the civilisation of the world”.³⁷² And among these “ameliorative influences” he specifically mentions the arts and sciences, where “the ultimate aim of all real knowledge and of all truth is the making of life worthier and wealthier. The work of the student is coming ever more fully in line with the efforts of those who, as philanthropists, as educationists, as members of corporations, as politicians, are bent on reducing the occasions of evil to individuals and of loss to the community, and on a more effective application of the laws and the constituents of social righteousness”.³⁷³

It was this understanding of the Kingdom of God as including far more than the religious or the ecclesiastical which Marshall Lang and Macleod owed substantially to Robert Flint, and it was the category which enabled Lang and MacLeod to break out of the theological straightjacket which had restricted earlier Churchmen. The predecessors of Macleod and Lang had expressed as much concern for the poor and

³⁷⁰ Ibid., p 70

³⁷¹ Chapter 17:20

³⁷² LANG *Church and Social Mission*, p 56

³⁷³ Ibid., vi

their conditions, but could not see any means of improving conditions other than converting the poor to the Gospel and involving them in the life of the Church through building more and more Churches As Donald Smith has put it, they wanted “to bring the Gospel to bear on the unchurched masses by means of a greatly extended and revitalised parochial system. The Church still believed that it was possible by this means to win back the estranged masses of the people to a life of respectable morality, personal piety and ‘sabbath day regularity’. Such a ‘christianization would, at the same time, inevitably raise the social and economic condition of the masses”.³⁷⁴

***Good Words* and Donald Macleod’s Social Theology**

Donald Smith has observed that “Reflecting the views of its editor, this magazine [*Good Words*] consistently displayed broad liberal sympathies in relation to contemporary social issues. Macleod’s own editorials were particularly noteworthy in this regard”.³⁷⁵ In various places he quotes widely from the 1885 monthly and occasionally from the 1881 editions of the magazine to illustrate that judgment.³⁷⁶ However it is clear from a closer examination of *Good Words* that Macleod developed his social theology not just, or even especially in the magazine’s editorials. It took Donald Macleod some time to stamp his own editorial authority on *Good Words* in the editions following the death of his brother Norman in 1872. For several years the rather counthy, kailyard style of the magazine under Norman Macleod’s editorship continued under his brother’s but by 1880 Donald Macleod had begun to introduce more socially relevant stories into the magazine. In addition the serialisation of novels by authors such as Charles Kingsley, and short stories, as well as biographical, historical, scientific, geographical and religious sections, Donald Macleod introduced

³⁷⁴ SMITH, *Passive Obedience* p 219

³⁷⁵ Ibid p 288

³⁷⁶ Ibid., pp 288, 301, 308

a section including social commentary. The contributions on social issues which Donald Macleod included fall into two categories: those which expressed very general views the need for social engagement and those which provide information on or descriptions of specific social problems or projects, and of those a majority reflect the contributor's personal knowledge or experience.

Typical of the more general contribution, was one on "The Relation of Religion to Secular Life"³⁷⁷ by Revd Principal George Grant of Kingston College who, echoing Macleod's criticism of ecclesiasticism, writes of the harm done by identifying religion with religious formalism, and insists that the effect of religion should permeate the whole of life through the commitment of individuals to it. Religion is not about rules, nor even a book, but "a new fact that occupies the heart and moulds the conduct", a description which would have perfectly fitted Macleod's view of the Kingdom of God. An article on "The Sacredness of the Secular Calling" emphasised the incarnational basis of the commitment to secular life. "The body is of God, the needs and occupations of this earthly life are of God, the domestic, social, and political life of man is of God; there is but one thing that is not of God in the world, and that is the heart which is set on worldly things".³⁷⁸ And a similar stress is made in an article "The Consecration of Daily Life": "The principles of Christianity in nowise institute or sanction a confusion in the relative values of secular and religious acts and thoughts. The principle is, indeed, enjoined, of a consecration of our entire life to the glory of God, and in the greater matter the lesser is necessarily included –

³⁷⁷ *Good Words*, 1881, pp 67-72

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p 830

duties connected with our daily wants and necessities, as well as the aim and purpose of our highest spiritual endeavour”.³⁷⁹

Typical of the hortatory style of general article was one in 1892 by George Matheson, the blind hymn writer, by then minister in St Bernard’s, Edinburgh, who wrote of poverty in the light of what he regards as a false view of the parable of Dives and Lazarus³⁸⁰ which criticises Dives for being sceptical about life after death. “The sin of Dives was not scepticism, not unbelief, not failure to lift his eyes beyond the seen and the temporal; it was failure to turn his eyes downward to those who suffered and toiled below. The sin of this man was uncharitableness”. In language remarkably reminiscent of Donald Macleod’s frequently employed description of the hard-pressed family, Matheson goes on to illustrate this by a contemporary precis of Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*:

He makes the ghost carry him, not down into hell, but up to the topmost garrets of the great struggling towns of earth, up the storeys of Whitechapel, of the Canongate, of the High Street of Edinburgh, of the wynds of Glasgow, of all the places where men weep and toil. He shows him the poor seamstress wearing out her eyes in struggle to support an aged mother, or the tiny little child dying of consumption which is really only the want of nourishment, and whom a little food would raise up to life and joy. He bears him into dens of squalour, into haunts of poverty, into scenes of misery³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ *Good Words*, 1883, p 266

³⁸⁰ St Luke 16 vv 19-31

³⁸¹ *Good Words*, 1892, p 108

The basis of Flint's later work on *Socialism* appeared in eight contributions to *Good Words* in 1890-91.

Valuable as these general articles no doubt were in outlining the basic themes of a liberal social theology, Donald Macleod published articles which dealt with very specific social issues or introduced the readership to personal experience of social problems.

In 1887, Sir John Lubbock, MP, later first Baron Avebury, who Theodore Hoppen describes as belonging "among a wide range of writers on social evolution,"³⁸² contributed an article on the early closing of shops, which pointed out that it was "very inconsistent that a girl in a factory or workshop should be forbidden to work more than fifty four hours in the week, while the hours of her sister in a shop often ranged as high as eighty to eighty five"³⁸³ and Lubbock's article contains in full the report of the House of Commons Committee which reported on the author's attempt to extend the provisions of the Factory Act to shops. A similar article in 1892 surveyed the variety of income levels and conditions in the hotel and catering trade.³⁸⁴ And in 1887 readers were told of the conditions experienced by the North Sea fishing fleet.³⁸⁵ Articles on the condition of prisons and prisoners frequently appeared. S. R. Hole, the Dean of Rochester, described the conditions he saw in Milbank and Pentonville prisons and made a special plea for help to be given in the rehabilitation of prisoners after release, and asked for the establishment of a Prisoners' Sunday. "This, at all events is in our power; let him who has done nothing for these poor

³⁸² HOPPEN, K.T., 1998, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886*, Oxford, p 480

³⁸³ *Good Words*, 1887 pp 20-24

³⁸⁴ *Good Words*, 1892, pp 754-758, C H D Leppington "Work and Wages in Hotels and Restaurants"

³⁸⁵ *Good Words*, 1887, pp 161-170 T Paul, "Life among the North Sea Trawlers".

prisoners do something now, and let him who has done little, do more".³⁸⁶ An article in 1901 highlighted the plight of children in prison, pointing out that since the passing of the 1870 Education Act the number of children in school had increased four times and in that period the number of child prisoners had halved. The article examined some examples of the treatment of child offenders on the continent, and recommended that young people should be tried in a special youth court, expressing concern that there were no special children's officers appointed to act as counsel for children, to enquire into the problems of delinquent children or occasions of truancy.³⁸⁷ The work of the St Giles Christian Mission in helping discharged prisoners on release was described in an article in 1887.³⁸⁸ There are contributions describing and commending the work of Savings Banks,³⁸⁹ advocating allotments³⁹⁰ and examining hostels for vagrants,³⁹¹ which concluded "Money in plenty is made out of tramps' hostels, and yet as little as possible is done for the comfort of those who patronise them". Social experiments such as restaurants for dockers³⁹² both to provide healthy food and to dissuade from visits to public houses are described, and socially important professions are encouraged.³⁹³

Two articles in 1894, perhaps surprisingly, provided a fairly sympathetic account of anarchists' meetings. An anarchists' club in Whitechapel was described as "exactly like a Church soiree. There is apparently the same respectability, the same easy, simmering excitement, the perfect confidence in the absolute rightness of their

³⁸⁶ *Good Words*, 1889 S R Hole, "Visit to a Convict Prison", p 761

³⁸⁷ *Good Words*, 1901 R M Barrett, "Hooligans at Home and Abroad" pp 388-395

³⁸⁸ *Good Words*, 1887 G H Pike "A Good Work among Thieves" pp 748-751

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, A Cargill "The Progress of Thrift", pp 334-337

³⁹⁰ *Good Words*, 1898, G J H Crespi, "Allotments" pp 779-783

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, T W Wilkinson, "The Tramp at home" pp 270-275

³⁹² *Good Words*, 1894, E Sellars, "Dockers Restaurants" pp 327-332

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, H Jones, "Nurses and Nursing," pp 554-556

purpose in meeting together,” and the author concluded that “anarchism is the exaggeration of the idea of Liberty just as socialism is the exaggeration of the idea of Equality. Both have parted company with each other and with Fraternity”.³⁹⁴ Later in the same year David Watson, whose social theology will be examined below³⁹⁵ gave an account of a Scottish anarchists’ meeting, involving representatives of the Independent Labour Party, Watson reached this critical but almost appreciative conclusion: “Just as a carbuncle proclaims disorder in the human body, so anarchy proclaims some disorder in the body politic. The first thing needful is a careful diagnosis of the disease; the second prompt and skilful treatment. The industrial classes of Great Britain are only awakening to the sense of their power. Once they fully realise it, will they abuse it? I do not believe they will”.³⁹⁶ Given the widespread suspicion in religious circles of socialism at the time, and in particular of the Independent Labour Party, the publication of these articles clearly indicated a more sympathetic tone than was typical of the Church.

In 1894, E. C. Tait proposed specific legislative changes for improving housing conditions. He recommended that before any house building was started, a certificate should be granted by a qualified surveyor “to prove that the site....was properly drained”; before any house was let a certificate would be required from a qualified architect that there were efficient drains and a proper water supply; and that during tenure the landlord would be legally required to put right any failings. He also proposed the appointment of a district surveyor and district architect, and the establishment of planning regulations. “At present as regards building every one does what is right in his own eyes; and this would answer well enough if we were snails,

³⁹⁴ *Good Words*, 1894, M. Macdonald, “Among the Anarchists” pp 125-129

³⁹⁵ See below pp **TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION**

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, D Watson, “An Anarchist Meeting in Scotland”, pp 445-447

each filling his own dwelling and carrying it about with him; but as we build for others, and the sanitary conditions of our houses may affect the whole community, it behoves the community to see to it that they are not left to the mercy of ignorance and rapacity”.³⁹⁷ The fact that, under an Act of 1892, Town Councils in Scotland, were required to appoint a burgh surveyor to oversee paving and draining and other works does not detract from the practical vision contained in this article. It was some time before burgh architects were appointed, and the author’s belief that historic cities should not be spoiled by “ugliness and bad taste” and speculative building subjected to standard of “good style in architecture” given practical and legislative expression.

It was clearly Donald Macleod’s intention not only to provide articles which analysed or described social issues, but also ones which provided social commentary based on personal experience. For example, in 1901, J Albinson described an experiment in Dumfriesshire, where a five-hundred acre farm was first leased and then purchased by several well-known Glasgow philanthropists, including Sir John Stirling Maxwell, and a “labour colony” was established. Unemployed men were assessed in Glasgow and, if found suitable, sent to the farm to work. “In the four years of the colony’s existence nearly two hundred men have passed through its doors, the majority of whom have been placed into respectable and permanent situations”.³⁹⁸ In 1898, the Duchess of Somerset described the conditions she saw in a tour of a city workhouse, the wards for infirm old women and men, and the maternity wards,³⁹⁹ and she then proceeded to criticise the inclusion together of those whose “vice” had led to their condition, and those whose suffering, she said, was through no fault of their own. She strongly recommended that the two be not included together. As for provision in

³⁹⁷ Ibid., E C Tait “Wanted a House” pp 475-479

³⁹⁸ *Good Words*, 1901, J Albinson, “The Scottish Labour Colony”, pp 344-349

³⁹⁹ *Good Words*, 1898, Duchess of Somerset “A Plea for Workhouse Inmates” pp 396-400

the workhouse for the young, she wrote “The young of the poor, no less than the young of the rich, from their earliest years require love and tenderness. This is what the workhouse lacks”. And Duncan Cumming, who had personal experience of the workhouse from inside contributed his reflections in 1901 “It is not given to everyone to realise by experience what parish relief actually means,” he wrote. “The rich are content to believe it to be a wise provision of a beneficent nation for the comfort and well-being of its poor, while those for whom it is intended look upon it with such horror and loathing.....when I found myself destitute and friendless in the streets of London, I knew no more about the workhouse than that whenever I had heard it mentioned it was with the sneer of contemptuous pity, and now, when I found myself face to face with dire poverty, I shrank from getting closer to it”.. Cumming goes on to describe appreciatively an average day in the workhouse, from rising at 6.45am, through the various work allocated - stone breaking - picking apart old rope - fieldwork and gardening - types of domestic activity - to evening leisure time, and meals which he found acceptable. “There are all sorts of people to be met with in a large workhouse.....Besides the ordinary day-labourer and street-hawker, you may find among the crowd that throngs the day-rooms at night, walking about in listless vacuity, or sitting at the long tables reading or playing at draughts – decayed actors, journalists, lawyers, many old soldiers and a few sailors, commercial men, yes, and I grieve to say it, a broken-down clergyman or two. The rough and foul-mouthed graduate of the slums is also to be met there, especially during the winter months, but his life is not made too easy for him”.⁴⁰⁰

⁴⁰⁰ *Good Words*, 1901, D Cumming, “Life in a London Workhouse”, pp 305-309

A number of points can be made about Donald Macleod's editorial role in choosing these articles, and others similar to them, for publication. First, the articles reflect and confirm what Macleod believed about the Kingdom of God. Macleod believed that the Kingdom of God was advanced when the spirit of Christ was carried into every sphere of interest and duty. The examples of projects to alleviate the conditions of the poor, or proposals for the improvement in society's provision for them, were for Macleod examples of "the spirit of Christ" at work in the secular world. Second, the articles conform to Macleod's conviction that contributions made in the secular world have their own integrity and validity in relation to the Kingdom of God. That is, these contributions do not require some ecclesiastical or biblical connection. They are allowed to speak for themselves without any necessity to "baptise" them before they can be properly incorporated in the work of the Kingdom of God. Third, the articles are consistent with Macleod's favoured style of drawing the needs of the poor and the disadvantaged to the attention of his audience or congregation. In speeches and sermons Macleod frequently adopted a narrative or descriptive style, and the contributions which he solicited bear that stamp also. In this regard Macleod was ahead of his time in recognising and the stories of, by, and about the poor are as important contributions to the advance that the Kingdom of God as are the more objective and intellectual analyses of the issues involved. Fourth, there is a clear connection between material solicited by Macleod for *Good Words*, and the sort of evidence of experiments which were brought to the notice of Glasgow Presbytery's Housing Commission. E C Tait's article on legislative changes he proposed to improve housing conditions is reflected, as we shall see, in evidence given to the Commission, and the establishment of labour colonies, which were described in 1901

by J Albinson forms one of the important recommendations of the Housing Commission.

Donald Macleod's social theology found expression not only in the character of the contributions he commissioned for *Good Words* but also in his own articles, many of which reflect important aspects of that social theology. Each monthly edition of *Good Words* contained "Sunday Readings", one for each Sunday, sometimes contributed on a monthly basis, but often covering several months or a year. . It is quite clear that these Sunday Readings were edited versions of sermons preached by clergy in their own pulpits. Donald Macleod's sermons on the Kingdom of God which appear in *Christ and Society* were originally published in a shortened form in *Good Words* in five articles for June 1892⁴⁰¹, and in the year 1897 he contributed a Sunday reading for each Sunday of the year,⁴⁰² which provide considerable evidence of his theological position in general and his social theology in particular. Macleod also contributed single articles from time to time. For example, in 1881, just as the magazine was bearing the mark of his editorship, he contributed two articles on the theme of whether society was Christian.

The category of the Kingdom of God, and the distinction which Macleod makes between the Kingdom and the Church, are significant themes in the articles he wrote for *Good Words* and there is evidence of this not only in the series of articles specifically dealing with the Kingdom (already examined when dealing with their

⁴⁰¹ *Good Words*, 1892, pp 497-503

⁴⁰² *Good Words*, 1897, pp 58-64, 123-127, 207-212, 279-284, 349-355, 423-428, 495-500, 567-572, 640-644, 711-716, 779-785, 852-856

later publication in *Christ and Society*)⁴⁰³ but in references to it when Macleod is ostensibly writing on other topics.

In an article in 1897 entitled “Is society Christianised?” Macleod asks “Were St Paul to revisit the earth, and to contemplate the actual state of European society, we wonder how far he would recognise the characteristics of the Kingdom of God for which he laboured?”⁴⁰⁴ Despite the fact that the Kingdom of God is not a theme which is prominent in the Pauline literature, Macleod maintains elsewhere that the coming of the Kingdom of heaven on earth is one of the ends for which Paul cared.⁴⁰⁵ Macleod likes to contrast the Kingdom of God with a Kingdom where worldly wealth and power exist. For example in a comment on the commercial world “and assuming that it is composed chiefly of men professing to be governed by the principles which Christ inculcated, we may ask how far there is a proportionate importance attached to them, such as he attached to that Kingdom whose primary reward is righteousness, and that other Kingdom whose primary rewards are success, money and power which wealth bestows?”⁴⁰⁶ Reflecting on the *Nunc Dimittis* Macleod again affirms in strong terms his commitment to the Kingdom of God where again its poverty is contrasted with power and materialism of the world which he sees marked by a European arms race, divided Churches, philosophical scepticism and social inequality, and he comments that “we cannot help asking whether we have any tokens of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. But to cease to believe is to perish spiritually. We are saved by hope and can labour with heart only in proportion to our faith in the possibility of human salvation. If we yield to the base pessimism which

⁴⁰³ See above pp xx **TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION**

⁴⁰⁴ *Good Words*, 1881, p 94

⁴⁰⁵ *Good Words*, 1897, p 496

⁴⁰⁶ *Good Words*, 1881, p 95

pours the bitterness of its gall over every attempt to bring in the golden year of our God, our own lives will degenerate”.⁴⁰⁷

Despite such occasional bouts of pessimism, Macleod’s contributions to *Good Words* reflect his confidence that humanity will progress to a Kingdom of God on earth. In the second of his articles in 1881 on whether society has been Christianised, he criticises an understanding of the atonement which suggests that the final work of Christ leaves nothing for an individual to do. “This projection of salvation into the next world renders religion so unreal in the present world as to deprive it of its proper influence....One of the first things which may strike a reader of the Gospels is the great importance our Lord attaches to the present life. He tells us, indeed, very little regarding the next world but an immense deal about how we ought to live in the present”.⁴⁰⁸

In a series of Sunday Readings on Socialism in September 1897, Macleod asks, as his brother Norman had done in an article published during his days as editor of *Good Words*⁴⁰⁹ what would be seen if the Kingdom of God had arrived and the Christian ideal was realised in society.

Schools and colleges would tell of the widespread desire for knowledge; railways and telegraph would speak of far-reaching intercourse; factory and workshop would reveal industry and ingenuity; the multitude and frequent shabbiness of modern Churches in contrast to the grandeur of the few old cathedrals would indicate the change from the power of the priesthood to individualism, or perhaps from dependence on a ritual

⁴⁰⁷ *Good Words*, 1889, p 811

⁴⁰⁸ *Good Words*, 1881, p 234

⁴⁰⁹ See above p xx **TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION**

to a more purely spiritual worship.⁴¹⁰

Good Words contains clear references to Macleod's distinction between Kingdom and Church. Sometimes the distinction is explained, as when he says that "the Church is the divinely instituted society through which the Kingdom of God is promoted" whereas "by the Kingdom of God we understand the reproduction of the Spirit of Christ in man....it is the spirit of a life, rather than an institution. It is goodness rather than a ritual".⁴¹¹ At other times the difference is posed more pithily and using typical language: "To what extent would our Lord, if he came among us, trace the influence of the religion he came to establish? Standing in the midst of a society, the very breath of whose life was ecclesiasticism and theology, (Jesus) told them 'they knew not the Father'".⁴¹² And to those who regret that "it is the civil government and not the Church; the municipalities and county councils and not the county councils, which are ameliorating the conditions of the people", Macleod relies on his conviction that the Kingdom of God is realised through its pervasive effect on individuals to reject what he regards as the false antithesis of secular activity and religious goal. But he takes the argument further than that. The new sense of public duty may be inspired by Christian ideals, but it is not to be assumed that the Church's role is itself to bring about specific proposals which stem from inspired Christian ideals. "Better that sanitation, housing of the poor, recreation, brightening of life by art and such like matters – all closely related to social well-being – should be the result of a nobler public life having been awakened in the community and expressed through its civil government, than that they should be the work of Churches and ecclesiastics, who

⁴¹⁰ *Good Words*, 1897, p 780

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 495

⁴¹² *Good Words*, 1881, p 94

would probably accomplish them much less efficiently”.⁴¹³ Specifically Macleod encourages religious people to take far more interest in “the things which might brighten the lives of the people of our land” and “in the question how the people can best be taught to enjoy the brightness and beauty of life, how their holidays can be made real festivals, and how under the gloom of our climate and the monotony of toil, more opportunities may be given for the refreshment of healthy relaxation”.⁴¹⁴

The idea of progress, for which, like Robert Flint, Donald Macleod sees evidence in the Darwinian theory of evolution, is essential to the view of the Kingdom of God which Macleod develops in *Good Words*. He says that just as in Genesis the spirit of God moved to bring order out of primeval chaos, so religion relies on “a similar foundation, for it rests on the faith that God’s Kingdom must come, that spiritual law and order will take the place of the confusion of evil, and that all things are moving towards this end. The prayer ‘thy Kingdom come’ is the highest aspiration of the religious spirit. We feel that the spirit of God is even now working in us for the production of that order, and that every struggle after its accomplishment forms part of that mighty work which, commencing in the natural world, shall have its perfect fruit in the spiritual”⁴¹⁵ – a passage which could well have been written by Robert Flint.

Donald Macleod had a preacher’s gift for word-pictures and a journalist’s flair for vivid language, and in *Good Words* both came together when he contrasted riches and poverty. In a series of Sunday readings on the theme of “The Way, the Truth and the Life”, Macleod tackles the exclusive claims of Christian salvation, which can be seen

⁴¹³ *Good Words*, 1897, p 641

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 423

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 350

as implying that it is the socially secure who are guaranteed salvation “while the poor, lying huddled away in dens of suffering, who have scarcely ever heard the name of God, except as an oath, and who in their penury may be fighting a battle against temptation and sin, of which the wealthy pietist can scarcely form a conception, are to be doomed eternally because they never had believed in Christ as ‘the way and the truth and the life’ – the Christ whom they know scarcely anything about?”⁴¹⁶

Following the passage quoted earlier about what changes would be observed if the Kingdom of God arrived on earth, Macleod continued in language sufficiently strong to merit fuller quotation:

Methinks it would be a sad verdict which would be given when the contrast between the housing of the poor and of the wealthy was considered; when the dens and rookeries were observed here, and the palaces of millionaires there; when the magnificence of the piles consecrated to commerce, to the banks and exchanges, was duly weighed as against the garret of the ‘sweater’ and the cellar of the starving; or when the eye of the future antiquarian fell on the hundreds of houses dedicated to the sale of intoxicants and to other forms of vice; or when he examined the character of our products and compared the scamped work of our handicraft with the faithfulness evident in that of other generations, every unseen detail being as perfectly finished as what was meant to catch the eye.....Are those monuments stamped with the character of the Christian ideal that was professed, or do they indicate a mere struggle for success and for wealth, in which those who won the prizes

⁴¹⁶ *Good Words*, 1894, p 212

kept them to themselves, and left a fearful wreckage of poverty and coarseness to perish in its own dens? Would not the verdict be that the dominant idea of this civilisation of ours was money-making and selfish indulgence rather than that of the Kingdom of God⁴¹⁷

Writing about the Magnificat, Macleod ironically pictures well off congregations singing about the rich being sent empty away, and adds “without a hint of political intention (Jesus) pronounces woes on the rich and blessings on the poor.....It is the persistence with which similar lessons are taught by Christ which has led some modern critics to imagine that these sayings represent no more than the class prejudice of a Galilean peasant and the jealousy entertained by a villager respecting those that were better off”. However, Macleod insists, since the epistles continue the same theme, it must be intrinsic to Christianity that the need and hunger which are present in poverty is what distinguishes the poverty which Christ blesses from the pauperism which is to be challenged.⁴¹⁸

It is important to realise that Macleod is not arguing that Christ’s blessing of the poor is purely typological. “Great wealth securing gratified tastes, amusement, power, pleasure is apt not only to engross the interests, but to raise a man above those felt needs which drive others in their despair to God”.⁴¹⁹ Macleod moves from his conviction that it is the sense of need which the poor exemplify, and which Christ blesses, to say that civilisations similarly crave new advances and fresh achievements, for example, in the field of social welfare, , and through the struggle to meet these, society develops. Thus social need becomes the promoter of political progress. This

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., p 209

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., p 207-208

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., p 209

is an important aspect of Macleod's social theological method which, in one sense is totally incarnational, but, as well as applying what he believes about the Kingdom of God to the life of the world, Macleod is equally willing to use what he believes about the life of the world and how he sees social progress occurring and advancing to illustrate aspects of the coming Kingdom of God.

Macleod's tendency to contrast the Kingdom of God with the spirit of this world has already been noted. That contrast is frequently expressed in terms, if not of class tension then at least of class difference, where he compares the hard toil of the manual labourer with the relative ease of others..⁴²⁰ Macleod puts it very forcefully in two other articles in *Good Words*. Writing about the comparative influence of heredity and environment, he criticises the willingness of society "to permit masses of our people to grow up, generation after generation, under conditions wherein their physical and moral degradation has been almost assured" and he points out the hypocrisy of criticising the moral degradation while allowing the conditions to produce it to exist. Thus he writes that "the luxury and idleness of Belgravia are just as unwholesome as the misery of Whitechapel. The abominations of the fashionable world are as destructive – perhaps more so – than those we mourn over among "the lapsed classes".⁴²¹ Sixteen years earlier, Macleod had written "The man of wealth, and the lady of rank and fashion, who live as separate from those of a lower social scale, as the high caste Brahmin does from the Pariah, may be full of a certain religious sentimentalism and zealous for the specialities of their favourite Church or worship. The merchant whose mind is absorbed with gain, and whose transactions may not always be quite regular if tested by the standards of unblemished honour,

⁴²⁰ *Good Words*, 1897, p 790

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, p 124

would not only be indignant of any doubt were thrown on the Christian character, but as the world has frequently seen, he may be a religious professor, famous for his long prayers and strict observances”.⁴²² Later he was to write of class distinctions, “There are many forms of inequality which are not necessarily inherent in society, nor in harmony with its ideal, and which it ought to be the work of the Christian spirit to remove.....The social demarcations which permeate every grade of life in this country often present features as cruel, groundless and even absurd as the petty tyrannies of caste in India”.⁴²³

As well as commissioning Robert Flint’s articles on Socialism, Macleod himself wrote about it. He was sympathetic to legislative social provisions which he describes as coming under the broad term “State compulsion”⁴²⁴ and he describes the socialist’s dream as “a noble one”, but he sees an element of compulsion as almost inherent in socialism “Christ would first create the spirit of brotherhood, and through its power enforce the duties of property; but they first confiscate the property and then compel brotherhood by regulation of police, or, as the French epigram puts it, ‘Be my brother, or I will shoot you!’⁴²⁵ However Macleod was not afraid to write about “the socialism of the New Testament”⁴²⁶ a fact which Donald Smith recognises as showing “the considerable extent to which representative Christian social thought had altered from earlier in the century”.⁴²⁷

⁴²² *Good Words*, 1881, p 96

⁴²³ *Good Words*, 1885, p 460

⁴²⁴ *Ibid* p 775

⁴²⁵ *Good Words*, 1897, p 644

⁴²⁶ *Good Words*, 1881, p 96

⁴²⁷ SMITH, *Passive Obedience*, p 301

Marshall Lang was similarly sympathetic to aspects of socialism. Its ideals were in sympathy with the social ideals of Christianity. Its belief in state intervention coincided with the views of those who saw the need for rapid government initiative and action in the social sphere, and it envisaged a social salvation which attracted the support of others “who have yet no fellowship with its ulterior aims, with some of its cardinal principles, and with the methods whereby it proposes to apply its principles and carry out its aims”.⁴²⁸ He criticised the Marxist measuring of “value by manual toil” for “to place this toil in the seat of authority is surely to contract the horizons of life and to set up an irrational touchstone of worth”.⁴²⁹ He rejects socialism’s attacks on property.⁴³⁰ And while he recognises that socialism is a rebellion against the selfishness of capitalism, he insists that such selfishness is not typical.⁴³¹ However he is prepared to make the generalisation that the brotherhood of socialism is based on class,⁴³² whereas Donald Macleod is more willing to stress class divisions. In their view of socialism, Macleod tends more to approve with qualifications while Marshall Lang tends to disapprove with occasional plaudits.

Macleod and Marshall Lang’s Views Compared and Contrasted

Macleod and Marshall Lang are frequently cited as together being responsible for the change in the Church of Scotland’s attitude to social questions. A.C. Cheyne has written of the late nineteenth century Church’s willingness to express concern for those he describes as “at the bottom of the social heap, “The outstanding instances of this preparedness probably came from the Auld Kirk’s Glasgow Presbytery, where men like Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod brought about a whole series of reports

⁴²⁸ LANG, *Church and Social Mission*, p 223-24

⁴²⁹ Ibid., p 231-2

⁴³⁰ Ibid.,p 237

⁴³¹ Ibid., p 247

⁴³² Ibid., p 272

and debates on bad housing and its religious implications”.⁴³³ In his very significant article in 1977 Donald Withrington refers to the work of the Church of Scotland’s Presbytery of Glasgow, “led by Lang and Donald Macleod”, as illustrating “the changing climate of the late 1880s” towards social issues.⁴³⁴ Donald Smith links the Moderatorial addresses of the two men, Lang’s in 1893 and Macleod’s in 1895, as displaying “much more advanced social views” than the addresses of their predecessors which were “largely unaware of the challenge which the social, political and economic changes of the period presented to the Church”.⁴³⁵ S. J Brown describes Macleod and Lang as “Christian progressives (who) shared a new appreciation for the role of social environment in shaping individual character. They recognised that overcrowding, poor diet, and the drabness of slum life could ensure moral and spiritual defeat for all but the strongest or most fortunate, and that individual vices, especially intemperance, were frequently more the effects than the causes of poverty”.⁴³⁶

Macleod and Marshall Lang were at one in recognising the extent of poverty within the city of Glasgow, for which they both use the image of the Upas Tree, which, according to legend, was believed to have the power to destroy other growths for a

⁴³³ CHEYNE, A.C., 1983 *The Transforming of the Kirk, Victorian Scotland’s Religious Revolution*, Edinburgh, p 135

⁴³⁴ WITHRINGTON, D.J., , “The Churches in Scotland: c 1870 – c 1900: Towards a New Social Conscience, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, vol,XIX, 1977, pp 155-168. Withrington was not the first to draw attention to the importance of the work of Lang and MacLeod in encouraging the Church of Scotland to discover a social conscience. FLEMING, J.R., *The Church in Scotland 1875-1929*, Edinburgh 1933, p 177) refers to the “good work” of the Presbytery of Glasgow’s Commission on the Housing of the Poor, and singles out the contribution of Lang in particular. Remarkably, DRUMMOND, A.L., and BULLOCH, J.B.P., *The Church in Late Victorian Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1978) make no mention of the social concern of the Presbytery of Glasgow nor of Donald MacLeod and only include Marshall Lang for his work on liturgy and early moves towards the reunion of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church.

⁴³⁵ SMITH, *Passive Obedience*, pp 281,2

⁴³⁶ BROWN, S.J., “Reform, Reconstruction, Reaction: The Social Vision of Scottish Presbyterianism” in *Scottish Journey of Theology*, Vol 44, 1991, p 498.

radius of fifteen miles.⁴³⁷ However they disagreed, sometimes publicly and sharply about whether intemperance was the cause or the consequence of poverty. Macleod's view was expressed in a powerful passage in a speech he made to the General Assembly of 1888 which requires full quotation not only to convey a sense of Macleod's use of vivid imagery, but because the images he employed in this speech he was to use several times in expressing his sympathy for the man, and, very significantly, the woman, who found release in drink, for which so many Churchmen condemned them.

Think of the life of many a working man, coming home from his day's hard labour, tired and depressed, to one of these houses. It may be that the wife has a washing, and the atmosphere is full of the steam of the washing tub, and of the clothes hung up to dry, and she, poor soul, is perhaps irritable and tired also; the children, as children always are, are noisy and restless; the baby, whom the mother scarcely has time to attend, crying and fretful in the cradle. What can a man in these circumstances do? Do you expect every evening the sweet picture presented of the book taken down to read, and a recreation in the one-roomed house of 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'? Alas! The room up several stairs in a close in Glasgow is a different affair from the cottage in Ayrshire, amid fresh air and a thousand outside beauties. Where is the man to go for relaxation, or rather for escape from the state of things I have pictured? If he goes to the 'close-mouth' or to the street to smoke his pipe, he is met by the chill air of the foggy frosty night and an atmosphere laden with the smoke and fumes of manufactories. Where

⁴³⁷ CHECKLAND, S., 1977, *The Upas Tree*, Glasgow, p iv

is any resource to be found? Need I answer? The only resource he finds is too frequently the public house. Or I ask you to imagine the life of the labouring man's wife? She may be, as many of them are, a woman who has been trained to method and system, and who can make the fireside bright for her husband; but how many of these poor mothers, with the very best intentions, have not been so trained? They are overwhelmed with toil – children to clothe, babies to feed, houses to tidy, the washing, cooking and the thousand little economies of one who has to manage a little wage, making it meet house-rent, school-fees, and a thousand petty expenses – these accumulating a burden of care upon what is often a feeble frame and nervous temperament, produce naturally prostration and despair, and a craving for anything which will break up the monotony of ceaseless activity, and afford some stimulus and excitement to raise her, even momentarily, above herself. She is also led to the terrible resource of strong drink. Fathers and brethren, you remember the story of Bunyan, who when he saw the man brought to execution, said 'There goes John Bunyan, but for the grace of God'. Dare we, as we contemplate the trials of our poorer brethren, and the sins of intemperance into which they are so often betrayed, assume the Pharisaic attitude of those who thank God that they are not as those who have so fallen in the battle of life. Nay, rather but for the grace of God and for the circumstances in which by his mercy we have been placed, would we be better than they?⁴³⁸

⁴³⁸ MACLEOD, D., 1888 *Non-Church-Going and the Housing of the Poor*, Glasgow

These were images and pictures Macleod was to repeat in a speech on non-Church-going at the General Assembly of 1889⁴³⁹ and they also formed part of a sermon on intemperance in Macleod's *Christ and Society*.⁴⁴⁰ Marshall Lang seconded Macleod in the 1889 debate, but said he wanted to qualify a number of Macleod's remarks.. He referred to what Macleod had said about intemperance being caused by poverty. Marshall Lang "thought the order might be inverted, and that it might be said that poverty was caused by intemperance.....he thought that if they were to lock up the public houses, they would remove a large amount of temptation which surrounded the poorer classes", to which Macleod retorted "It was all very well to say 'shut up the public houses' but did anyone fancy for a moment that intemperance could be cured by that?" Marshall Lang was as inclined to stress the significance of intemperance as a cause of poverty as Macleod was to minimise it. In a debate in the 1891 Assembly Macleod referred "to the evil effects of overcrowding and to the way in which drinking habits followed upon the misery of the home," whereas Marshall Lang insisted that wherever his commission had visited "there stalked the giant form of intemperance. Again and again they were told that the Church, or any philanthropic society might do what they liked, but so long as they had a public house for every 120 or 160 of the population, their work would be useless".⁴⁴¹

Donald Macleod and Marshall Lang's differing attitudes to the relationship between intemperance and poverty comes out in the books which express their social theology. The two men disagreed on abstinence. Although refusing to comment disparagingly on those who support total abstinence, Macleod wrote

⁴³⁹ References to the debate in the 1889 General Assembly are drawn from The Glasgow Herald, June 1st 1889

⁴⁴⁰ MACLEOD, *Christ and Society*, p 298-9

⁴⁴¹ *The Glasgow Herald*, May 28 1891

I am not a total abstainer, and I decline to be so on principles which have commended themselves to me both from reflection and experience.....I claim for myself what I accord to others – the liberty of judging and of acting according to conscience. The course I take in this matter is what I believe to be not only in harmony with the teaching and example of Christ, but involved in the very spirit of the Christian religion, whose object is to train men to the right use of freedom, and to the exercise of self-control, or, in other words, Temperance”.⁴⁴²

Marshall Lang, however, supported the position that

in view of the temptations to which multitudes are exposed, of the misery and shame associated with the quaffing of ardent spirits, it is expedient, in the exercise of Christian liberty, to forego a right to the use, not merely, perhaps not at all, for personal safety, but rather for the sake of others, so that the protection and helpfulness of the covenant of Christian brotherhood may be more effectually realised, and the protest against indulgences which lead to intemperance may be emphasised”.⁴⁴³

However, the two men understand each other’s point of view. Although Marshall Lang insisted that “the wretched dwelling, with all its attendant features, is largely a consequence of intemperance, he realised that “there can be no doubt also that it is largely a cause of intemperance”. And although Donald Macleod believed that “there are social causes which, to the shame of the Christian community still exist” he

⁴⁴² MACLEOD, *Christ and Society* p 290

⁴⁴³ LANG, *Church and Social Mission*. p 178

nevertheless poses the question “What is the chief cause of pauperism?” and answers “Drunkenness”.⁴⁴⁴ And both men agree that the provision of more wholesome alternatives to the public house is an essential measure to combat drunkenness. Macleod asks, in his supportive way, what produces drunkenness: “May we not safely assert that among other causes this one may be named – that we have been fighting against God, we have been neglecting those laws of his in human nature which make men crave for some brightness, some alleviation of its hardship, some change from its monotony, some excitement to deliver for a while from its dullness and despair? What do we give them? Little or nothing.....We ought to supply them with healthy mental change and healthy amusement”.⁴⁴⁵ And Lang, in more judgmental vein writes

The charm of the public house is largely owing to its being a place where men can congregate, gratifying their social instincts, and breaking the dull monotony of life. If we would save men from the dangerous, we must supply the wholesome and really creative sociality. Do as we will, to many the superior place, with the superior entertainment, will have no charm. Those who have toiled in the endeavour to reach persons who frequent the smaller drinking-houses, and to give them a better variety for their leisure hours, know how disappointing the toil is. The men most wanted prefer to snug in their old haunts⁴⁴⁶

Macleod’s speech to the 1889 General Assembly stressed three of his favourite themes. “During the Glasgow exhibition”, Macleod said, “when there was music in the open air, when that music was listened to not merely by visitors from other places

⁴⁴⁴ MACLEOD, *Christ and Society*. p 298

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., p 33

⁴⁴⁶ LANG, *Church and Social Mission* p 183

but by the working men and the poor, the police had to report that many of the public houses of Glasgow had almost been empty. We had to recognise the sacredness of amusement". Marshall Lang, however, "questioned whether the poor took advantage of the amusements provided, or of the parks which were to be found in the neighbourhood of our large towns".

Macleod had criticised the increase in Sunday working, not on the grounds of sabbatarianism but because working on Sundays deprived those who had to work in very poor conditions and surroundings during the week of the opportunity to enjoy leisure time, and in particular the provision of transport on Sundays which Macleod was well known for supporting. In dealing with Sunday working, Marshall Lang made a barbed criticism of Macleod, who had been a supporter of Sunday transport so that those in cities might enjoy the countryside. "Dr MacLeod referred to Sunday labour, which was a great and growing evil, and there was no class for whom he had greater sympathy than the conductors and drivers of the tramway cars, and he urged that they should not give an example in this matter that they ought not to do".

Granted that Marshall Lang had, on two occasions in the General Assembly heard a version of Macleod's evocation of this scene, and may have read it in Macleod's book, his reference to the working man's need for recreation is highly critical. "Where food is insufficient, where squalor reigns, where the atmosphere is vitiated and unwholesome, the craving to get out, to realise some additional sensation, some fuller life, leads to the only appreciated source of the desired stimulus. And a reckless

unconcern for all except the gratification of the moment is a concomitant of habitual poverty”.⁴⁴⁷

Although Macleod and Marshall Lang both regarded the improvement of social conditions as necessary to combat non-Church-going, they were at one in still regarding a reformed territorial parochial system as indispensable and workable. In a lecture in the winter of 1885-6, Donald Macleod said that “if the terrible social problems which present themselves in all our great cities, are to receive a solution at the hands of the Christian Church, it can only be by the revival of the efficient and thorough work which an endowed territorial system is alone fitted to furnish”.⁴⁴⁸ He then went on to say that the weakness of the parochial system lay in the *quoad sacra* parishes and burgh Churches which relied on seat rents set by the town councils, and where the minister “becomes the minister of the congregation which he has attracted, and not the minister of the parish”.⁴⁴⁹ As a result, Macleod concluded that “in most of our large cities the parochial system can scarcely be said to exist”.⁴⁵⁰ In his speech to the General Assembly of 1888, introducing the overture from his Presbytery Macleod again argued that “the Church at large should make the parochial system more efficient”.⁴⁵¹ He once more criticised the *quoad sacra* Churches and their ministers who spent their time entirely on people living outside the parish. “What time can a minister with a thousand communicants find for territorial work? And even if he does

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., . pp 184-5

⁴⁴⁸ MACLEOD, D., 1886, “The Parochial System” in *The Church and the People, St Giles’ Lectures, Sixth Series*, Edinburgh, pp 133,4

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., p 148

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., p 149

⁴⁵¹ MACLEOD, *Non-Church-Going and the Housing of the Poor* p 14

territorial work, where could he put the people of the district if they wished to come to a Church which is already fully let to others”.⁴⁵²

Marshall Lang, in his 1901 Baird Lectures insists that “a thorough system of ministration – a division of the country into small areas or territories, each provided with a machinery by which, in dependence on God’s spirit, the blessings of religion can be diffused, and the aims of the Christian society can be realised” (*i.e.* the parochial system) is “indispensable” to “the social efficiency of the National Churches”.⁴⁵³ But Lang had to be convinced that reform of the parochial system or the abolition of seat rents was necessary for what he called the “social efficiency” of the Church. In a sermon preached to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr in 1887, the year after Macleod had urged an overhaul of the parochial system, Marshall Lang said, with regard to combating the drift from the Church:

Proposals of one kind and another are mooted – the readjustment of our parochial system, the abolition of seat rents in our Churches, the increase of endowments, the origination of a Church army in the likeness of the English Church army. These are among the suggestions which have been made. With regard to them I shall only submit that, *before deciding on any plan involving departure from lines hitherto observed or the disturbance of parochial arrangements which have received the recent sanction of the Church*, [my emphasis] it would be well that the General Assembly should appoint a Commission, including trusted clergy and laity, to inquire into the causes of the alienation of so many of her people, and to consider what, in connection

⁴⁵² Ibid p 15

⁴⁵³ LANG. *The Church and Social Mission*” p 108

with the territorial principle, the parochial economy of the Church, and the whole dispensation of the gospel in the land, might be done, or should be done, so as, by the blessing of God, to make the ministrations of religion more adequate to the want, more effectual for the good of the nation”.⁴⁵⁴

Just a few months before that sermon was preached, there was an incident in the Presbytery of Glasgow which illustrates well the caution of Marshall Lang as compared to a more radical approach by Donald Macleod. At its meeting in December 1886, Robert Thomson, Minister of Ladywell, proposed that there should be a collection in all the Churches in Glasgow and the neighbourhood to assist the unemployed. Donald Macleod seconded the motion but Marshall Lang, while confessing “tenderly sympathetic feeling for the unemployed” argued that “this motion might defeat the object it had in view” and instead he proposed that the Presbytery appoint a deputation to represent the condition of the unemployed to the Town Council.⁴⁵⁵

Macleod and Marshall Lang had somewhat different expectations of what could be achieved through ecclesiastical effort or even reform. Lang was optimistic that social conditions would be improved through converting people by means of the parochial system. He wrote:

In aiming at the conversion of the individual soul, the Church is really aiming at and promoting social good; every one who welcomes Christ as the light of his seeing becomes necessarily a force economically

⁴⁵⁴ LANG, J M, *They need not Depart*”, Sermon preached in Glasgow Cathedral at the Opening of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, Glasgow, 1887, p 4

⁴⁵⁵ *The Glasgow Herald*, December 5 1886

and morally gainful to the world...A man may be improved through the improvement of his environment – assuredly, he will be deteriorated when he is left with a wretched environment, - but the improvement coming from without will be effectual only when there is an improvement coming from within.....the social happiness desiderated is possible only through such a renewal of the will as shall deliver a true self-love, perfected in social fellowships and disciplines, from a love of self which separates from one's neighbour. Permanently elevated life implies the moral dynamic that Christianity specially contemplates".⁴⁵⁶

That statement can be contrasted with what Donald Macleod said in his St Giles' Lecture on the Parochial System:

Let us make allowances for the agencies at work within and without the Church. Do not let us detract from the good which may be accomplished by city and other missionaries, Bible-women and visitors, many of whom are filled with a true enthusiasm. Do not let us depreciate the value of the volunteers, male and female, who go down to the poorest and to the worst with the loving message of Christ, declared in many ways besides that of dogma. We know how much the community is indebted to them, and a thousand other agencies, for daily ameliorations of the worst conditions of society. But we would be untrue to our convictions, if we did not proclaim our belief that, beneficial and numerous as these operations are, they do little more than *scratch the surface* of the great social problem".⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁶ LANG, *The Church and Social Mission* pp 315,6

It is true that Macleod goes on to contrast the voluntary efforts of those to whom he referred with an endowed territorial system “by which the services of the best clergy can be secured, and their energies fully devoted to a locality, into every moral crevice of which they can bring the saving influence of the gospel to bear”⁴⁵⁸. He was indeed, like Marshall Lang, a defender of the territorial parochial system, and it would have been surprising at a time when talk of disestablishment was common and pressure on the national Church from United Presbyterians and the Free Church was considerable, had they not found it necessary to defend the system on which the national Church was based. But the difference in emphasis between the two is still remarkable.

The greatest difference in emphasis between Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod was in what they thought the aim of social reform was to achieve. In his sermon to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, Marshall Lang made it clear in the text he chose: “they need not depart”, that his aim was to encourage a return to the Church. Speaking to the 1889 General Assembly he said that “he believed that the cause of non-Church-going was to be found as much in the Church as in the social surroundings. He believed that it was not so much the masses who had forsaken religion, as religion that had not gone to the masses”⁴⁵⁹.

Again, there is a contrasting difference in emphasis with Macleod, who said at the same Assembly that “he would like to get the opinion of the people, of working men, on the subject of non-Church-going”⁴⁶⁰. “If we are entering on this battle against the

⁴⁵⁷ MACLEOD, “The Parochial System” p 150-151

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid p 132

⁴⁵⁹ *The Glasgow Herald*, June 1 1889.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid

evils of society for the object merely of getting our Churches filled and our Church statistics run up; if in going to the people we give them the slightest suspicion that the chief end we have in view is to get them to go ‘to our Church’, we will fail and deservedly fail”. True: Macleod goes on to say that it should be irrelevant which Church people go to, but in his emphasis he envisages a wider social purpose: “that we, as a National Church, care chiefly for the good of the nation; that we desire ‘not to be ministered unto but to minister’”.⁴⁶¹

Conclusion

The social theology embraced by Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang, expressed in terms of society’s progressing towards the realisation of the Christian vision of the Kingdom of God reflected was an ideal vehicle to reflect precisely the mood of confident optimism of the Glasgow of the late nineteenth century, whose growth, in T M Devine’s judgment “stood out in the colossal and continuous nature of its exuberant growth,”⁴⁶² where “by 1913 Glasgow and its satellite towns in the surrounding region of intensive industrialisation produced one-half of British marine-engine horsepower, one third of the railways and rolling stock, one-third of the shipping tonnage and about a fifth of the steel”.⁴⁶³

A Kingdom-based social theology was able to take and to give an account of both the positive contribution towards social improvement which growing municipalisation made, and also to describe and condemn the social conditions which were believed to be a denial of the anticipated progress towards the Kingdom of God.

⁴⁶¹ MACLEOD “Non-Church-Going and the Housing of the Poor, p 17

⁴⁶² DEVINE, T.M., LEE, C.H., and PEDEN, G.C., 2005, *The Transformation of Scotland*, EDINBURGH, p 39

⁴⁶³ Ibid., p 35

Donald Macleod and Marshall Lang presented their support for improved social services and expressed their criticism of social conditions from the standpoint of this social theology, though both in the terms in which they outlined it and in the emphases they placed, there were differences between the two men's views. They differed on their view of the Church, on specific social issues such as temperance and Sunday transport, , and on the class divisions in society.

The difference in emphasis in the two men's ways of describing the Kingdom is also reflected in the way they write about it. Marshall Lang saw the Kingdom of God in wide, sweeping terms, and so his social theology is similarly inclusive and general, as well as being expressed in broad generalisations. Donald Macleod would have agreed with Blake that good must be done in minute particulars, and so the articles he commissioned for *Good Words*, and those he wrote himself, reflect a view of the Kingdom of God advancing slowly by the sort of small advances of which the material in *Good Words* is a practical example.

Both Macleod and Marshall Lang were strong supporters of the parochial system. In his address as Moderator of the 1893 General Assembly, Marshall Lang said "The Territorial or Parochial Economy, honestly, faithfully worked, is the best means of securing.....warm, strengthening food for the masses. And of this economy the Church established and endowed is the safeguard".⁴⁶⁴ Two years later, in his closing address to the Assembly of which he was Moderator, Donald Macleod said "Our Endowed Territorial system.....has been the source of untold spiritual good to

⁴⁶⁴ LANG, 1893, *The Church and the People*, Edinburgh p 35

the country. We therefore hold and make plainly known that we would consider union too dearly purchased by the loss to our country and to religion of such potent factors for the evangelisation of the land and the security of the State”.⁴⁶⁵

It is not clear why Macleod and Marshall Lang, who both insisted, following Robert Flint, that the Church and the Kingdom of God were not to be equated, and who both regarded artistic, literary and scientific movements as having a part to play in the advancement of the Kingdom God along with the Church, should regard the established Church of Scotland’s endowed parochial system as the strongest defence against the forces which would hinder the Kingdom’s advance. The arguments both of them advanced against the case being which was being made at the time for disestablishment and voluntarism may or may not have been valid, but these arguments seem strangely inconsistent with their support for regarding the Kingdom of God as being brought closer by a wide spectrum of interests and institutions.

More pragmatically, however, Macleod and Marshall Lang continued to give their support to the parochial system while recognising it was failing to meet the needs of the age. In his Moderatorial address, Marshall Lang described the parochial ministry as “too wooden in present administration. It wants in the flexibility of life. It wants in adaptiveness to the complex civilisation which we have to consider. It does not make allowance for the wide breaking loose from traditional ways which characterises our generation”.⁴⁶⁶ In other words, the ministry on the parochial model was out of date. And when Donald Macleod addressed the Assembly as Moderator he was highly critical of the gathered congregations which were undermining the

⁴⁶⁵ MACLEOD, 1895, *Lines of Progress*, Edinburgh, p 19

⁴⁶⁶ LANG, *The Church and the People* p 2

parochial system which he supported, and argued for either the appointment of Superintendents, or for considerably more intervention by presbyteries, to counteract the inefficiencies of the parochial ministry.⁴⁶⁷ Both men appear to have been wrestling with social problems, but determined to preserve the parochial system as the best way by which the Church could respond to them. If they relied on a (by then) questionable structure inherited from the Church's past to deal with the housing problem, that problem itself, while for Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod a present reality, was one which was being replaced by other issues which a contemporary social theology had to face. And neither of them provides much evidence of addressing these newer issues. For example, during the 1880s, the "Woman Question" was emerging. Lesley Macdonald has written that "it did not occur to the great majority of Scottish Presbyterians, male or female, to challenge the paradigm of domination which shaped the official life of the Church".⁴⁶⁸ Neither Macleod nor Marshall Lang were alive to that challenge. When Marshall Lang first raised the issue of the Church's response to the depression of 1879 in the Presbytery of Glasgow, his motion praised "the efforts of ministers and Kirk Sessions to meet the prevailing distress" but mentioned "the efforts of ladies in providing food and clothing".⁴⁶⁹ When Donald Macleod preached on social inequality, there was no mention of the political inequality of women.

Leah Leneman has drawn attention to a group of Church leaders, including Marshall Lang, "all of whom were in favour of extending the franchise to women"⁴⁷⁰ Leneman

⁴⁶⁷ MACLEOD, *Lines of Progress* p 13

⁴⁶⁸ MACDONALD, L.A.O., 2000, *A Unique and Glorious Mission: Women and Presbyterianism in Scotland 1830-1930*, Edinburgh p 218-9

⁴⁶⁹ Minutes of the Presbytery of Glasgow, 5 November 1879

⁴⁷⁰ LENEMAN, L., "The Scottish Churches and 'Votes for Woman'" in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 1992, p 237

is based on a review in The Glasgow Herald of a book containing the view of Church leaders, and published by the Central Committee of the National Society for Woman's Suffrage. However, that review states "J Marshall Lang, while expressing sympathy for the movement so far as giving women ratepayers the franchise – not married women – would draw the line at women being returned to parliament. He would have women, married or unmarried, on questions of social reform and the Church on the grounds that women are more vitally interested, even than men, in all the concerns of religious life and the home".⁴⁷¹ To describe this as being "in favour of extending the franchise to women" is somewhat disingenuous.

Donald Macleod shows no evidence of being interested in women's political advancement, though, in the extract already quoted,⁴⁷² and as already noted, he does express a sympathy for the married women who find the pressure of the home driving her to seek relaxation in drink. Macleod also expresses considerable support and sympathy for women workers paid little to ensure cheapness.

Not long ago I found here, in Glasgow, a girl of apparently eighteen folding up a pile of embroidered skirts – richly embroidered with a pattern executed by the sewing machine. She was about to take these to the warehouse that employed her, and on my asking what she received for her work, she replied fourteenpence the dozen, supplying her own thread and liable to have the work thrown back to her in the case of the slightest flaw being discovered. Looking back on this picture of sore trial, I imagined that other picture when the same garments

⁴⁷¹ *The Glasgow Herald* date tbc Details of the book are not given in the review and it has not been traced.

⁴⁷² . Above p xxx **TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION**

would be exposed in the warehouse windows as extraordinary bargains.⁴⁷³

It was perhaps easier for Donald Macleod to be supportive of, and patronising towards the eighteen year old Glasgow girl than to consider what his social theology had to say to the ‘Woman Question’.

The other important contemporary issue on which both Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod are silent is Irish immigration and the consequent growth of the Roman Catholic population of Glasgow which rose by over 100,000 between 1870 and 1900, with the number of priests in the archdiocese rising from 74 to 234.⁴⁷⁴ It is the assessment of T M Devine that the lack of adequate educational provision and the constraints of poverty and discrimination in the job market help to “explain why upwards social mobility among the Scoto-Irish was still very limited” ; and that “the Irish immigrants and their descendants seem to have developed almost a distinct and introverted ethnic community”.⁴⁷⁵ Neither in the works of Macleod or Marshall Lang is there the same expression of sympathy for the Irish as there is for the indigenous working class.

Part of the explanation for the social theology of the two men failing to address what were emerging as serious issues for west of Scotland society lies in the fact that what Donald Withrington describes as Macleod and Marshall Lang’s “crusade to improve the housing of the urban poor” was, in their view, “a practical means of confronting vexed problems of the ‘lapsed thousands’ in Glasgow and elsewhere, by helping to bring into being such improvements in the conditions of urban living as would give

⁴⁷³ MACLEOD, *Christ and Society*, p 21

⁴⁷⁴ DEVINE, *The Scottish Nation*, p 379

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., pp 494,495

mission and evangelicalism a more reasonable if not a more certain chance of success". The Presbytery of Glasgow's concern for housing was in the interests of evangelism. As the role of women in the Church was both defined and stereotyped, there was no need to support the emancipation of women in its cause, and, if the thesis which C.G. Brown has consistently argued is correct, every reason not to! As Irish immigrants clearly did not offer fertile ground for protestant evangelism, their social, educational and political welfare was not a priority. The failure of those with social vision to address these questions may well have contributed to what Brown calls "the secularisation of social prophecy starting in the 1890s".⁴⁷⁶

Historians of the period have been right to link together the names of Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang, but these historians have tended to assume a common social theology than the evidence suggests. Both men were powerful speakers and accomplished writers, and so historians have tended to form their views on the basis of the published works and speeches of the two men. This, however, may have led to ignoring the influence and impact of a contemporary figure who did not occupy their place in Church's rhetoric, but who played an equally significant part in the Presbytery of Glasgow's part in the Church's response to the urban crisis.

⁴⁷⁶ BROWN, C., "Protestant Churches and Working Classes" in WALKER, G., AND GALLAGHER, T., 1990, *Sermons and Battle Hymns*, Edinburgh, p 81.

Chapter 4

THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO GLASGOW'S SLUM HOUSING

Introduction

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the expansion of municipal activity on both sides of the Atlantic, as Bernard Aspinwall has traced in his *Portable Utopias*. Because of its industrial and commercial life, Glasgow had earned the title of “the second city of the Empire”; on account of the responsibility which the Corporation of Glasgow had assumed over so many areas of the city's life, Glasgow had also become known as the “Model Municipality”.⁴⁷⁷

In 1888, six million people visited an exhibition of Science and Art, held between May and November, opened by the Prince and Princess of Wales, and twice visited by Queen Victoria. The exhibition, which occupied sixty four acres of land in the city's west end was held for two main reasons: to emphasise Glasgow's imperial status and municipal achievements, and to raise money for an art gallery and museum to house the city's considerable collections. In conjunction with the exhibition, the city also hosted meetings of the British Medical Association, the British Archeological Association, the Library Association and the Institute of Naval Architects.

In the same year as the exhibition, the Church of Scotland's Presbytery of Glasgow set up a Housing Commission to investigate living conditions in the slum properties

⁴⁷⁷ WATSON, D., 1908, *Social Problems and the Church's Duty* Edinburgh, Revised Edition, 1921, p 43, (*Social Problems*)

of which the six million visitors to the showcase exhibition doubtless saw little. As the size of the city grew with the increase of migrants from the highlands and Ireland, the population of the old city moved westwards, leaving the new working class to occupy the area of the old city centre, where there were two types of housing available: 'made down houses' and the typical Glasgow tenement. The 'made down houses' had once been occupied by Glasgow's middle class. Each room in these detached houses became a separate house, and was then often sub-divided. The Glasgow tenement was a three or four storey building. It was entered through a common close or passage which met a communal staircase, which, in turn led upwards to individual houses, and downwards to underground cellars which were often used to provide accommodation, and to a back court, originally intended to provide space for recreation and drying washing, but had frequently been built on to provide further dwellings.

Description of the housing available in the old city centre in the last quarter of the nineteenth century does little to convey the appalling conditions in which people were forced to live. Very little light made its way into the houses. Walls were damp, roofs leaked, staircases and passages were dilapidated, ventilation utterly inadequate, the air rancid from inefficient drains. Families lived and slept in one room, Siblings slept with parents. 32% of all children who died in Glasgow before the age of five died in one-roomed houses compared with 2% in five roomed houses.⁴⁷⁸ Children were at risk from sexual exploitation and incest was common. Frederick Engels' description in 1844 was still accurate later in the century:

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid, p 37, quoting the report of a sometime medical officer of health, Dr Russell, 'The Death Rate in one-apartment houses' p 10

I have seen human degradation in some of its worst phases, both in England and abroad, but I can advisedly say, that I did not believe, until I visited the wynds of Glasgow, that so large an amount of filth, crime, misery and disease existed in one spot of any civilised country. The wynds consist of long lanes, so narrow that a cart could with difficulty pass along them; out of these open the ‘closes’ which are courts about fifteen or twenty feet square, round which the houses, mostly three or four storeys high, are built; the centre of the court is the dunghill, which probably is the most lucrative part of the estate to the laird in most instances, and which it would consequently be esteemed an invasion of the rights of property to remove.....In the lower lodging houses, ten, twelve or sometimes twenty persons, of both sexes and all ages, sleep promiscuously on the floor in different degrees of nakedness. These places are generally, as regards dirt, damp, and decay such as no person of common humanity would stable his horse in”.⁴⁷⁹

Gradually the Church of Scotland’s Presbytery of Glasgow put pressure to bear on the expanding local authority to take steps to tackle the problem of slum housing, particularly in the area which had once been the centre of the old town, but now was in the east end of the expanded city where there were 88 acres of densely populated slum dwellings. There were almost 20,000 “ticketed houses” in the city, containing less than 2000 feet of cubic space. On each door, a small metal ticket showed the total cubic content and the number of people who were legally permitted to live inside. A minister who visited a considerable number of these houses reported that

⁴⁷⁹ ENGELS, F., *Conditions of the Working Class in England 1844*

“some extraordinary cases of overcrowding were found – the occupants hiding sometimes from the night inspectors in cupboards, in presses, under beds and even on the housetops”.⁴⁸⁰ Despite the conditions in which they were forced to live, working people were often hostile to the improvement of their conditions which was often perceived as the intrusion of the state or the municipality into their lives.

Initially the Presbytery sent deputations to the magistrates, but in 1888 the Presbytery appointed its own Housing Commission, a move which was not entirely altruistic: the Presbytery believed that poor housing was a contributory factor to non-Church going. The work of the Commission has been widely linked to the names of Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang, but it was a largely ignored minister from the centre of the east end slum area, Dr Frederick Lockhart Robertson who proposed that the Commission be set up and who chaired it. It has not been sufficiently recognised that the members of the Commission were by not all members of the Presbytery, but included those with expertise in health, housing and sanitation. The Commission concluded that it was the function of the Corporation to insist that all houses should be made habitable and clean and the function of the Church to encourage the poor to lead decent, clean lives. As a result of one of the Commission’s strongest recommendations, the Glasgow Workmen’s Dwellings Company was set up, again largely due to pressure led by F L Robertson. The company was formed by public spirited citizens in 1890 with capital of over £40,000, and a dividend limited to 5%. The company bought and renovated blocks of slum property as well as erecting new tenements, and rented houses to unskilled labourers earning around £1 per week.

⁴⁸⁰ Watson, Social Problems, p 35

Early in the twentieth century, the Corporation of Glasgow set up its own Municipal Commission on the Housing of the Poor, chaired by Sir Samuel Chisholm. Presumably because of the work done by the Presbytery's Housing Commission, the Church of Scotland was neither formally represented on the Municipal Commission, nor did it give evidence. However the minister of St Mary's Free Church in Govan, Revd Robert Howie was a member of the Municipal Commission and the Free Church Presbytery submitted evidence, which was presented to the Commission on the Presbytery's behalf by two ministers, Revd Gilbert Laurie and Revd William Ross. They were examined by the Commission, and gave evidence of practical steps to alleviate poverty taken by them. Their evidence makes clear that there was a considerable difference in emphasis between the attitude of the Free Church in Glasgow to housing and the Church of Scotland. The Free Church was much more inclined to place the blame for overcrowded conditions on landlords and factors than the Church of Scotland, and there was clearly no doubt in the Free Church's mind that drink was the principal factor in urban poverty. The Free Church's tendency to be critical of landlords is understandable, granted the Free Church's strong support in the highlands, following the Clearances, and the large numbers of migrants from the highlands to Glasgow, who brought with them to the city their hatred for landlords. On the other hand, the Church of Scotland's reluctance to admit that intemperance was a contributory cause of poverty and poor housing is explicable, given the Church of Scotland's reliance on support from the Conservatives, whose ranks included those prominent in the profitable liquor trade, in opposition to the disestablishment views of the Free Church, and the support for disestablishment within sections of the Liberal Party.

The Glasgow of Macleod and Marshall Lang's Day

Sydney Checkland has described the Glasgow where Macleod and Marshall Lang ministers as “prosperous and proud”, which, “in the generation or so after 1875 presented a picture of impressive well-being and confidence”.⁴⁸¹ The entrepreneurial spirit of shipbuilders such as the Connells, the Elders and the Lithgows, combined with the availability of coal and iron in close proximity and the skills of the workforce enabled Glasgow to become the prime area for shipbuilding in Britain, and allowed the regional economy to flourish. By 1870 half of those employed in the shipbuilding industry in Britain worked on Clydeside. When the world economy went into recession in the 1880s, the engineering and shipbuilding industries became increasingly dependent on naval rather than mercantile contracts where they faced considerable foreign competition. The expansion of the chemical and engineering industries was made possible by a constant supply of labour from immigration from the highlands and Ireland. The population of Glasgow increased between 1871 and 1901 from 477,744 to 761,709. The city was, however, a place of huge differences in income and class divisions., though there was little evidence of class conflict, largely because the city’s geographical structure separated the well off and the rich from the poor, who were mainly concentrated in the slum areas around the old city centre, where Robert Buchanan and Norman Macleod had ministered and to which John Marshall Lang was called in 1873.

The years during which Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod were colleagues in Glasgow saw the expansion of municipal activity and control at first under the Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council of the city of Glasgow, which, in 1895 became, by

⁴⁸¹ CHECKLAND, S., 1977, *The Upas Tree*, Glasgow, p 2

act of parliament, the Corporation of the city of Glasgow. The Glasgow City Improvement Act of 1866 set up a City Improvements Trust. The preamble to the Act stated that “it would be of public and local advantage if various houses and buildings were taken down, and those portions of the city reconstituted, and new streets constructed.....and several of the existing streets altered, widened and diverted, and that in connection with the reconstitution of those portions of the city, provision were made for dwellings for the labouring classes who may be displaced on consequence thereof⁴⁸²

Although the Act of 1866 authorised the Trustees to erect, and seemed to contemplate that they would erect new buildings on the lands acquired by them, this power practically remained unexercised until 1889. It would appear that the Trustees, after clearing away the dilapidated and insanitary buildings from the land acquired by them within the compulsory areas, expected that the land would be taken up by private enterprise for the building of model dwelling houses and business premises, at prices which would largely recoup the ratepayers for the expenditure which they would have to bear by way of assessments. The City Improvement Trust was empowered to demolish ninety acres of houses and buildings around the old city centre, and replace thirty nine new streets and alter twelve others to provide houses for “the working and poorer classes”. Another Act of 1871 continued the provisions of the act to cover areas not bought up and extended the time-limit for their purchase.⁴⁸³

The City Improvement Trust seems to have been successful until the collapse of the property market in 1878 and the failure of the City of Glasgow Bank. Builders were

⁴⁸² *Municipal Glasgow, Its Evolution and Enterprises*, Glasgow, 1914 (Issued by the Corporation of the City of Glasgow) p 48

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp 48-50

no longer willing either to feu or to buy land, and many properties bought for demolition and redevelopment were left standing. Housing activity resumed in 1888 and by 1894, almost all the land purchased through the City Improvement Trust had been built on. As a result largely of redevelopment the population of the area around the centre of the old city dropped by 50,000. Between 1871 and 1884, seven model lodging houses were built, and in the Saltmarket a “family home” was established providing accommodation for workers who had been widowed and whose children had had to be locked up in their homes when their father went to work, but now could be supervised.

Meanwhile other significant areas of the city’s needs were either being taken over by the municipal authority or started by it. The beginnings of the city’s art collection was housed in the mansion house of Kelvingrove in 1870, which was extended in 1876. Work on a new museum and art gallery was begun and it was opened in 1902. The first tramway line was municipally constructed and opened in 1872 and the tramway system developed rapidly thereafter. In 1871, Stirling’s Public Library was combined with the Glasgow Public Library, The Mitchell Library, gifted to the city, opened in 1877 housing 14,000 volumes. By 1885 there were 62,000 volumes and 468,000 books issued to readers. In 1901 Andrew Carnegie gave the Corporation of Glasgow £100,000 to provide eight libraries within the city and another five around it. The Glasgow Police Act of 1866 authorised the provision of public baths and washhouses. The first swimming baths were opened in 1878. The first steam fire engine was introduced into Glasgow in 1870 and the magistrates authorised the first electric fire alarms to be erected in a town or city in the United Kingdom in 1878. An act of 1866 empowered the magistrates to provide lighting for streets and common

tenement stairs, and all the lighting of the city and its suburbs was vested in the municipal authority in 1869. By 1870, the Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council were empowered to provide electricity for the whole city, to cleanse all streets and to control cattle, horse and fish markets and every slaughterhouse, and the four existing parks became municipal property in 1878. In 1870 there were 774 hospital beds; by 1912 the number had risen to 1362.

It is against the background of this almost frenetic increase in municipal activity that the pastoral ministries of Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang were exercised, and their social theology was expressed and developed.

Early moves in the Presbytery of Glasgow

Attention has already been drawn to the recognition by Cheyne, Smith, Brown and Withrington⁴⁸⁴ of the part played by Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod in drawing the Church of Scotland's attention to the urban crisis through their involvement, first with the Housing Commission set up by the Presbytery of Glasgow and later in the General Assembly committees which relied on and pursued the work of the Glasgow Presbytery Commission. Insufficient notice, however, has been taken of the moves in the Presbytery which led up to the appointment of the Housing Commission and which reveal the extent to which neither the Presbytery nor the congregations within it were over enthusiastic supporters of Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod

In the late 1870s the shipbuilding industry was experiencing one of the major cyclical depressions which occurred from 1822. "Given the integrated economic structure that

⁴⁸⁴ See above, p xx **TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION**

had developed in the west of Scotland, cyclical depressions in shipbuilding had serious knock-on effects on related industries”.⁴⁸⁵ On 6 November 1879, Marshall Lang moved that the Presbytery

express their deep regret on account of the now long continued depression of trade and commerce of the city and the widely prevalent distress caused thereby.. They desire gratefully to acknowledge the prompt and judicious action of the civic authorities in the relief of destitution.....Further they record their sense of the generosity and self-denying labours of many, especially the efforts of ladies in providing food and clothing. And in view of the scarcity of labour and the suffering which it is feared may be experienced during the ensuing winter, while recognising the efforts already made by ministers and Kirk Sessions to meet the prevailing distress, they recommend them to exercise a special watchfulness over the poor of their parishes and congregations and to take such measures either through special organisation or otherwise as shall aid the deserving in their temporarily difficult time.⁴⁸⁶

In his speech to the Presbytery, Marshall Lang asked that the “warmest congratulations” be expressed to the Lord Provost and the magistrates for the “prompt action” they had taken to enable £27,000 to be spent on helping 40,000 people.⁴⁸⁷ Robert Thomson of Ladywell Wellpark, who had been Principal of Carlton Academy where Robert Flint was a pupil, opposed Lang’s motion.⁴⁸⁸ Thomson had been heavily involved in politics, and had been elected MP for Kilmarnock Burghs in 1868

⁴⁸⁵ KNOX, W W., 1999, *Industrial Nation*, Edinburgh pp 86-87.

⁴⁸⁶ Minutes of the Presbytery of Glasgow,. 1877-87, Strathclyde Regional Archives CH2/171/24

⁴⁸⁷ *The Glasgow Herald*, 7 November 1879.

⁴⁸⁸ SCOTT, H., 1920, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol 3, Edinburgh p 406.

but did not take his seat, and returned to the ministry. He wrote a life of Robert Flint. Flint's official biographer claims that Thomson "made a speciality of modern languages, and it was under him that young Flint began the study of French, probably also of Italian".⁴⁸⁹ Thomson was a belligerent character, who was described in a contemporary journal as having "become a constant attender at Presbytery meetings where, although he never speaks in the sense of addressing the reverend court, the deep bass of his whispers to his neighbours, the muffled thunder of his guffaws, sometimes the long-drawn regurgitations of his breath as he reposes peacefully in a pew, echo again along the roof of the session house of the Tron Kirk".⁴⁹⁰ Thomson wanted the Presbytery to go much further than expressing regret at the depression and applauding palliative measures taken by the Corporation. He said that Marshall Lang had dealt with the issue of unemployment "in a sentimental way" which would do little to relieve the conditions of the poor. With typical pugnacity he claimed that it was unfair that the poor received so little when the officials of the Corporation who administered relief were paid between £1500 and £3500 a year, and he asked that Kirk Sessions within the Presbytery be asked to approach Glasgow Corporation with a view to using the city's Common good Fund to meet the needs of the poor and thereby "diminish the rates.....and reduce the salaries of overpaid officials". Although Donald Macleod did not want to be associated with attacks on the administration of funds for the poor, he argued that, rather than using officials of the Corporation to assess levels of poverty and therefore of assistance, it would be better to form an association of the best men to inquire into the individual circumstances of

⁴⁸⁹ Macmillan, *Life of Flint*, pp 23, 24

⁴⁹⁰ *The Bailie*, number xxx. 18XX

the poor, They would be kindly rather than appear suspicious. And, Donald Macleod concluded, Kirk Sessions had benevolent funds and they should use them.⁴⁹¹

Although Marshall Lang's motion was approved, asking Kirk Sessions to exercise a special watchfulness over the poor of their parishes and congregations and to take measures to aid the deserving poor, it does not seem that Kirk Sessions were assiduous in undertaking this responsibility. None of the minutes available for the Kirk Sessions within the established Presbytery of Glasgow refers to any discussion following the approval of Marshall Lang's motion. Since it only called on Kirk Sessions "to exercise a special watchfulness over the poor" perhaps discussion was not anticipated.

At its meeting the following month, Thomson tried again to move that in the light of unemployment in Glasgow the Presbytery should memorialise the government to give help to the unemployed and the Town Council to utilise the city's common good fund to provide work for the unemployed, but he was defeated in an obviously poorly attended Presbytery by 15 votes to 3.

At a meeting on 11 October 1882, the Church of Scotland Presbytery of Glasgow was informed that a letter had been received from the Clerk to the Free Church Presbytery of Glasgow, William Scrymgeour, proposing the setting up of a joint committee of the two Churches to tackle the question of non-Church going. Scrymgeour was, significantly, minister of Bridgegate Free Church of Scotland, where, in 1873, he had succeeded Dugald McColl, author of *Work in the Wynds*, which highlighted the

⁴⁹¹ *The Glasgow Herald*, 7 November 1879

social and housing conditions in the area. Marshall Lang supported the approach from the Free Church and moved that “in the light of the non Church-going masses and the problems of last winter, being of the opinion that the territorial system, as presently existing, if carried out according to the original design, is the only one that can deal effectively with the non Church-going population, the Presbytery are ready to join in any effort for the more complete development of that system, and therefore if the proposed co-operation is to be in this direction, taking the existing territorial system as a basis of co-operation, the Presbytery, on receiving an assurance as to that effect, will cordially accept the invitation to appoint a committee”.⁴⁹²

However Marshall Lang’s motion was opposed by two ministers who had originally been ordained into the ministry of the Free Church but had joined the Church of Scotland, James MacNaught of Abbotsford and Peter MacLachlan of Newlands. MacNaught was ordained and inducted to the Free Church congregation of Maitland, whose Church building was opened in 1862. In 1873 he and the congregation moved from the Maitland building in Rose Street to a new one in Devon Street, and in 1876 joined the Church of Scotland. MacLachlan had been ordained and inducted to Hillhead Free Church in 1859. He resigned, and began mission work in the east end of Glasgow, and formed a congregation of the Free Church in London Road in 1874. He joined the Church of Scotland in 1876 and was inducted to Newlands, a Free Church congregation in the east end which joined the Church of Scotland a month before MacLachlan’s induction. MacNaught and MacLachlan moved that the Presbytery recommend that ministers of the Church of Scotland should co-operate practically with those of other denominations in the matters outlined in Scrymgeour’s

⁴⁹² Minutes of the Presbytery of Glasgow, 11 October 1882

letter but that the national Church's Presbytery of Glasgow should appoint its own committee to investigate non church-going

Marshall Lang's motion was carried by 12 votes to 9 and Marshall Lang himself was appointed Convener of the "Co-operation Committee", with Donald MacLeod a member of it. Four months later, Lang moved on behalf of his committee that Presbytery, having received a scheme of co-operation, should "recommend ministers and Kirk Sessions to co-operate as far as practicable with representatives of other Churches". Thomson of Ladywell Wellpark moved that co-operation should be restricted to ministers without involving Kirk Sessions. However, only he and his seconder, an elder named Stewart, voted for his motion which was defeated 26-2. An examination of the Kirk Session records for the period, however, shows no evidence of any Kirk Session taking up the matter of co-operation at a local level.

On 1 December 1886, the Church of Scotland's Presbytery of Glasgow approved that "a deputation be appointed to wait on the magistrates of Glasgow with the view of representing the condition of the unemployed, expressing the hope that instant action will be taken for the relief of the deserving, and further giving the assurance that the Presbytery will heartily co-operate with them in their efforts in that direction". Lang was appointed to lead the delegation, which included Donald MacLeod and reported the following month.

Lang was absent when the next stage of Glasgow Presbytery's involvement with housing conditions was reached. From November 1887 until July of the following year he was on leave of absence, undertaking a visiting ministry at the Scots Church

in Melbourne. At its meeting on 17th April 1888, the Presbytery of Glasgow considered an overture which it was proposed to present to the General Assembly of that year. The overture listed a number of factors which those who framed it believed contributed to non Church-going – insanitary conditions and poor housing, intemperance, lack of educational and social facilities – and commended as conducive towards higher Church attendance “the application of fresh Christian methods, along with the efficient working of the parochial system”, and it sought to have the whole subject remitted to the General Assembly’s Home Mission and Life and Work Committees. These committees were to report to the 1889 General Assembly but in the meantime were given powers “to approach Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions, and to aid them, should it be thought necessary, in organising voluntary effort on the part of members of the Church, or in employing ministers and evangelists eminently qualified who shall assist when requested by Presbytery or Kirk Session, in whatever way shall appear best; and further instruct all inferior courts to use all diligence in the promotion of everything which is likely to improve the physical, moral and spiritual condition of the people”.⁴⁹³ Although the overture was approved, and duly presented in the Assembly by Donald MacLeod, it was not passed by the Presbytery unopposed. Two different proposals, each of them attempting to separate the examination of social conditions from the issue of non Church-going were submitted to the Presbytery. One of them came from Dr Frederick Lockhart Robertson, minister of St Andrew’s Parish, who, along with Donald MacLeod and Marshall Lang, was a member of the Assembly’s Home Mission Committee. Robertson was seconded by Hugh Park of Cumbernauld. They moved that the Overture be not transmitted to the Assembly but “that a committee be appointed....to seek the counsel and co-operation

⁴⁹³ Minutes of the Presbytery of Glasgow, 17 April 1888, Strathclyde Regional Archives, CH2/171/25

of laymen of knowledge and experience to place themselves in communication with the magistrates, the officers of public health and the Improvement Trust, and endeavour, in conference with them, to frame a scheme *in which the work of the Church may be brought into harmonious action with the work of the magistrates, for improving the dwellings and the social and moral habits of the people*".⁴⁹⁴ [my emphasis] "If Presbytery transmitted the overture" said Robertson, "it was admitting that it was at its' wits end" and he suggested that "the Assembly would simply remit the matter to the Home Mission Committee, the bulk of whose members were country parsons who did not know one tenth part of the conditions of the problem that members of Presbytery knew themselves. They would call for answers to certain questions. The results would be tabulated and the whole matter ultimately find its way to the waste paper basket".⁴⁹⁵ An alternative overture was proposed by Dr Robert Stewart of St Mark's, who described the physical, social and moral conditions of the majority of people as such that they "render their attendance on religious ordinances a moral impossibility, and incompatible with the common decencies of life". In order that the "best thought and highest wisdom of the national Church" could be consulted, Stewart's overture wanted a Social Schemes Committee established by the Assembly "whose sole function would be to deal with the social conditions of the people. "What did it matter" Stewart asked the Presbytery, "if their worship was pure, that the doctrine was sound, if they could do nothing to mitigate this terrible evil. Who was to play the part of the good Samaritan? Was it the local authority or the government alone? It would be a bad thing for the Church if she let that part be played by other parties more than by herself."⁴⁹⁶ Dr Robertson's motion

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid

⁴⁹⁵ The Glasgow Herald, 18 April 1888

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid

received one vote, Dr Stewart's three, and the remainder of the Presbytery voted for the committee's overture

Donald MacLeod was appointed by the Presbytery to speak to the overture at the General Assembly. In doing so, he drew attention to the "suggestive coincidence" that in Glasgow there were 120,000 not going to Church and, according to the medical officer for the city, 126,000 living in one room. He accepted that intemperance might be a cause, but "if intemperance is often the cause, I assert it is often the consequences of these conditions of living". And he was sharply critical of *quoad sacra* Churches and claimed that "these are parish Churches only in name, and that they have become this from the system of seat-letting on which they all depend. The effect is such that the Churches belong to the seatholders and not to the parishioners, and the minister belongs to the congregation and not to the parish".⁴⁹⁷

The General Assembly of 1888, as a result of the overture from Glasgow Presbytery, issued this injunction: "having taken into consideration the information regarding the causes of Non-Church-Going, commends the subject anew to the consideration of all inferior courts, and particularly invites and enjoins Presbyteries, after special enquiry and conference regarding the non-attendance upon ordinances within their several bounds, and the causes which contribute to it, to take such action as seems possible and desirable, and to report to next Assembly, through the Home Mission Committee, the conclusions to which they have come, and the practical measures they have

⁴⁹⁷ MACLEOD *Non-Church-Going and the Housing of the Poor* pp 8, 11, 14 The version of his speech to the General Assembly, published by Donald MacLeod omits several of the more startling passages quoted in The Glasgow Herald's report of the speech the following day. See below for an account of some of the differences.

adopted”.⁴⁹⁸ The Assembly at which Donald MacLeod spoke to his Presbytery’s overture was the first one since the death of the convener of the Home Mission Committee Dr Kenneth Phin of Galashiels, who had chaired the committee for twenty five years and was also leader of the General Assembly from 1879 until his death. There was little surprise when Donald MacLeod was invited by the 1888 Assembly to succeed him as Convener of the Home Mission Committee five days after MacLeod presented the overture.⁴⁹⁹ In undertaking the remit given to it, the Home Mission Committee sent out a questionnaire to all presbyteries. 27 Presbyteries made no return, most them in rural areas, and only one from west central Scotland.⁵⁰⁰ 43 Presbyteries believed that Non-Church-Going did not constitute a problem within their bounds.⁵⁰¹ 11 Presbyteries recognised Non-Church-Going as a serious.⁵⁰² A wide variety of alleged causes of Non-Church-Going are cited in the Presbytery responses: intemperance (42 presbyteries), Sunday working (9), ignorance (5), poverty (31), indifference to religion (39), housing of the poor (11), scepticism (8), pernicious literature (7), migratory habits (13), parental neglect (6), seat rents (10), parishes too large (2), unsuitable worship (3), transference certificate system (4), lack of attraction of the young (6), sectarianism (13), distance from Church (7), absence of the territorial system (3), overwork. (2).

⁴⁹⁸ *Reports of the Schemes of the Church of Scotland, 1889*, p 389

⁴⁹⁹ MacLeod presented the Presbytery’s overture on May 30 and the Committee with responsibility for conferring with the Home Mission on the appointment of a Convener reported on June 4 that it recommended the appointment of Donald MacLeod who “addressed the house and intimated his acceptance of the appointment”. (*Reports of the Schemes of the Church of Scotland, 1888*, p237)

⁵⁰⁰ Peebles, Haddington, Duns, Chirnside, Kelso, Jedburgh, Selkirk, Annan, Lanark, Dunoon, Abertarff, Dunfermline, St Andrews, Arbroath, Kincardine O’Neil, Deer Turrif, Forres, Chanonry, Dornoch, Skye, Uist, Cairston, North Isles, Lerwick, Burravoe, and Olnafirth (*Reports of the Schemes of the Church, 1889*, p 391)

⁵⁰¹ Biggar, Dalkeith, Earlston, Lochmaben, Langholm, Annan, Wigtown, Kikcudbright, Paisley, Dumbarton, Inveraray, Kintyre, Islay and Jura, Lorn, Mull, Dunkeld, Auchterarder, Stirling, Dunblane, Kirkcaldy, Cupar, Meigle, Brechin, Fordoun, Aberdeen, Alford, Garioch, Ellon, Fordyce, Strathbogie, Aberlour, Abernethy, Elgin, Nairn, Inverness, Dingwall, Tain, Caithness, Lochcarron, Kirkwall, Forfar, Penpont, Tongue. (*Reports of the Schemes of the Church, 1889*, p 392,3)

⁵⁰² Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dalkeith, Stranraer, Ayr, Irvine, Greenock, Hamilton, Dundee, Lewis, and Dumfries (*Reports of the Schemes of the Church, 1888*, p 392)

Marshall Lang returned from Australia in July 1888 and, as Convener of the Presbytery of Glasgow's Committee on Life and Work became heavily involved in framing the response of the Presbytery to the Home Mission Committee's injunction to presbyteries. Three conferences were held with congregations in December 1888 and January 1889, and on 6 February 1889 Lang presented a report on the features of the conference, and moved that it be accepted as a provisional report of the Presbytery "and sent to ministers and Kirk Sessions to be considered at an early date and the results returned to the Presbytery by the end of April".⁵⁰³ It is clear from the report on the conferences that "intemperance was universally admitted to be a main cause both of the poverty of which the miserable home is a sign, and of the non-Church-going within the bounds". The report urged that the Church should not be content with the general recommendation of temperance but urge a more effective control of liquor traffic". On the question of housing, the report argued that the Church should provide the facts about housing conditions in order to increase public awareness of them and recommended that a Commission be appointed to inquire into the housing of the poor in the city".

At its meeting on 5 December 1888, the Presbytery met in conference session to discuss two issues: how to reduce the evils of intemperance and improve the social and physical conditions of the poor, and also how the worship of the Church might be made more "influential". In fact the Presbytery spent all the time available discussing housing conditions and had to postpone the discussion on worship until the next meeting.

⁵⁰³ Minutes of the Presbytery of Glasgow, 1888, Strathclyde Regional Archives, CH2/171/25

At the April meeting, Robertson had asked for a Commission to be appointed rather than approve the terms of the overture to the General Assembly, but on this occasion his motion that the Presbytery appoint a Commission was not presented as an alternative to any other course of action. The Commission should not, Robertson argued, consist solely of members of Presbytery but of others with expertise who could establish whether it was poverty, or something more than poverty, which led people to live in some of the conditions which existed within the city. Robertson specifically had in mind that Dr Russell, of the corporation's sanitary department, should be a member of the Commission and although he did not join, he provided information for it. Robertson concluded by asking "whether it was poverty or something more than poverty which led people to live in (appalling) conditions. The Church had a duty to bring the facts to people's attention".⁵⁰⁴ Revd Robert Pryde of Townhead immediately rose to say that Robertson had been "too diplomatic" in not blaming intemperance for poverty and poor housing, a view which was shared in the debate by ex Bailie Gray and Marshall Lang. Gray, however, went on to illustrate the significance of poverty in the housing issue by referring to the Corporation's own property, improved under the Improvement Trust. The Corporation, he said, owned property in the Drygate where the rent was £6 for a single room and over £9 for a two room house. In the Saltmarket (Robertson's parish) a one room and hall cost £8 and £11 for a two room. These were far beyond the means of certain classes in the community. Gray continued, "In 1873-4 there were 12,000 houses under £4 rent and 70,000 under £10 rent. In the present year there are 7,600 under £4 and £70,000

⁵⁰⁴ *The Glasgow Herald*, 6 December 1888

under £10, an increase of only 8,000 although the population of the city had increased by 80,000”.⁵⁰⁵

In the course of the debate, Marshall Lang proposed an important amendment to Robertson’s motion, which Robertson agreed to accept. Marshall Lang argued that the Commission should have representatives from the Presbytery of the Free Church and from the two Presbyteries of the United Presbyterian Church, which served Glasgow.⁵⁰⁶ Revd Dr John Watt of Cadder said that the parochial system had broken down as “ministers and Kirk Sessions had gone all over the city to get a congregation” which then had no personal commitment to the congregation’s parish area”. Donald Macleod deplored what he called “the poor attendance when so important a subject was being discussed, reflecting the lack of interest which is seen in the failure of many Kirk Sessions to discuss the subject or the reports sent to them.

This was a significant debate in the history of the Church of Scotland’s response to urban conditions for a number of reasons. First, it shows the extent to which, despite the information which the Presbytery was getting, there was still an underlying assumption, both in the terms of the motion which was discussed and the speeches made during the debate, that intemperance was the main contributory cause of poor housing conditions. There has been a tendency to assume, because the early moves in Glasgow Presbytery led to the important appointment of the Housing Commission to a recognition that there were economic and structural causes of poverty, that assumptions about personal irresponsibility had been abandoned. Clearly this was not

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid

so, though it is implicit in Robertson's motion and in what he said in his speech that he did not accept this explanation. Second, the Presbytery acknowledged that it required the expertise from outside the membership of the Presbytery, and that the ministry did not require to be heavily represented. Of the twenty five members of the Commission, only seven were ministers: Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod, John Macleod of Govan, David Strong of Hillhead, John Watt of Cadder, John Murray of Calton and James Paton of St Paul's. Four of them, Marshall Lang, John Macleod, John Murray and James Paton ministered in parishes with areas of extremely poor housing. There were sixteen laymen on the Commission. W. T. Gairdner was the Professor Emeritus of Medicine at Glasgow University and a former medical officer of health for the city. James Gray was a hatter, J. H. Dickson was a merchant and W. R. W. Smith was a yarn agent. However all three were members of Glasgow Corporation. J. Cleland Burns and Leonard Gow were shipowners, W. Graham and Nathaniel Spence were accountants, though Spence resigned from the Commission on moving to London. J. Honeyman was an architect, William Jolly was a schools inspector, David Murray was the Dean of the Faculty of Procurators, A. J. Hunter was Secretary of the Glasgow United Trades' Council, James Parnie was a partner in a firm of accountants and property agents, Sir John Cuthbertson had been MP for Kilmarnock Burghs and was Chairman of the Glasgow School Board. and William Smart was the first Professor of Political Economy at Glasgow University, and, according to C.G. Brown "the great catalyst to the municipal ideal in late Victorian Glasgow. Brown goes on to say that Smith's advice was sought by the Presbyterian churches and that he "instigated" the Presbytery of Glasgow's Housing Commission.⁵⁰⁷ It will be shown, however, that the credit for that, however, belongs

⁵⁰⁷ BROWN, C.G., "To be aglow with civic ardours" in *Records of the Scottish Church History*

to F.L. Robertson. William Baird belonged to the Baird family of steel producers. Donald Smith may be right to say that twenty one of them “rejected socialist proposals that the corporation build houses and let them to the poor at rents they could afford”⁵⁰⁸ but it is surely of some significance that the Presbytery which then, as now, was heavily weighted towards the ordained ministry rather than the eldership, chose to give the Commission an overwhelmingly lay, expert majority, and include members from other Presbyterian denominations. In recognising the contribution towards a more humane society of those who worked in secular employment, and in insisting that the Church’s job was to establish facts and present them to those in authority, Robertson was echoing the clearly stated views of Robert Flint over a long period of time. Third, the debate shows that although the Presbytery’s Housing Commission is almost always associated with the names of Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod, the part played by Revd Dr Frederick Lockhart Robertson has been neglected.

Lockhart Robertson was the son of the President of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. After an assistantship in Ayr, he was minister of Bonhill and then of the Middle Parish in Greenock. He was variously described as “a man of broad and statesmanlike outlook”,⁵⁰⁹ “inclined to take a rational view of things”,⁵¹⁰ and “specially solicitous for the welfare of the poor in his own large parish”.⁵¹¹ In a profile of Robertson shortly after he was presented to St Andrew’s parish in 1872 by the Town Council and inducted the following year, Robertson’s reputation for social

Society XXVI, 1996, p 189

⁵⁰⁸ SMITH, *Passive Obedience* p 237n

⁵⁰⁹ THOMSON, J.; 1905, *A History of St Andrew’s Parish, Glasgow*, p 41

⁵¹⁰ STORY, E. AND H., 1909, *Memoir of Robert Herbert Story*, Glasgow p137

⁵¹¹ SCOTT, *Fasti*, Vol 3 p 435

concern and action was given as the reason for the decision to present him and to call him.⁵¹²

Robertson used to describe himself as “minister of the Saltmarket”, an area of the old town centre which contained both dilapidated single room homes and tenements which had already been renovated.⁵¹³ It was an area which had once housed the Glasgow middle class whose former homes, now subdivided, provided the sort of housing which became the main focus of Robertson’s ministry in Glasgow.

When Robertson arrived in Glasgow, his energies were first devoted to restoring the fabric and interior of St Andrew’s. Initially, he believed this would attract the poor to the Church, and dismissed the fashionable view that the poor should be served by missions spawned by parish Churches. “These mission Churches of ours” he said “do not reach except to a very limited extent, the lowest stratum of the working population, and I think that any experiment is warrantable, any experiment that man may fairly try, to drag these human beings out of the filthy dens in which they live, and place them in a clearer atmosphere, and in this way imbue them with some sense of the love and greatness and majesty of Almighty God⁵¹⁴” Robertson discovered, however, that the restored St Andrews was not a place where the poor felt comfortable, and although, like Norman Macleod before him he preached to his congregation only in the forenoon and held evening services for the parish poor, these services did not have the effect he thought they would.. It is reported that he then virtually gave up pastoral work, which he employed assistants to undertake at his own

⁵¹² *The Bailie*, No 70 p 2

⁵¹³ *Ibid*

⁵¹⁴ THOMSON, *A History of St Andrew’s Parish*, p 41

expense, and, began to question his vocation, which is thought to lie behind his decision, having accepted a call to St Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh, to withdraw his acceptance on the day of his admission in 1877.

Robertson involved himself in work beyond his parish and the Church. When the City of Glasgow Bank collapsed in 1878, it was Robertson who moved that the bank should be wound up and proposed the relief fund which was subsequently established. In a speech which reflected his commitment to secular involvement as a religious vocation, he said "I shall, saving my sacred office, divest myself of every other duty and trust, and devote my time and attention to forwarding the success of such a scheme, believing that in doing my humble duty to lessen the appalling pressure of this calamity on many sorrowing hearts, I am serving my Maker and my Master just as truly and well as when I am preaching the blessed Gospel".⁵¹⁵ Robertson also took a considerable interest in education. The Endowed Institutions (Scotland) Act of 1882, and, through its executive, the Balfour Commission, had simplified and reorganised local schemes. In Glasgow a large number of local bequests were reorganised under three trusts.⁵¹⁶ It was Robertson who formulated the scheme which combined the bequests, and he became secretary of three of the trusts which were established.⁵¹⁷ Following the Glasgow Exhibition of 1888, the funds which accrued were handed over to an Association for the Promotion of Art and Music in Glasgow, and Robertson became secretary of it. Apparently there were occasional complaints made to the Presbytery about Robertson's "pluralities", but "the Church courts refused to listen to them".⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁵ *ibid.*, p 46

⁵¹⁶ SCOTLAND, J., *The History of Scottish Education*, Vol 2, London, p 38

⁵¹⁷ THOMSON, *A History of St Andrew's Parish*, p 43

⁵¹⁸ *ibid* p 44

As has been noted, it was Robertson who proposed the appointment of the Presbytery's Housing Commission, and he was to chair it. There will be a fuller examination of the Housing Commission and what it produced below,⁵¹⁹ but, in support of the contention that Robertson's contribution is crucial, it is necessary to trace now the part he played in introducing one of the strongest of the Commission's recommendations, which was subsequently endorsed far more widely than in the Presbytery of Glasgow. As Bailie Gray pointed out in the debate which set up the Housing Commission, most of the good property for rent cost far more than many of the poor could afford. The Housing Commission's main recommendation was the establishment of an association, supported by public spirited individuals, to purchase and renovate property which would be available for low rent to the deserving poor. It was Lockhart Robertson who raised this in the Commission, and, despite a certain lack of enthusiasm among some witnesses piloted it through the Commission and beyond. Robertson put the question to Thomas Binnie, a Land Valuator: "Suppose a company were to buy property in the east end of the town, about Bridgeton and other localities, at the present low price, and were to put it in perfectly good order, adding sanitary conveniences where they are needed, and ventilating it, and selecting the tenants, and take some interest in the tenants; do you think it would be a reasonably profitable undertaking?" Binnie replied that "it would yield a moderate interest and would do no good, because you say you are going to select your tenants, and for selected tenants there is no want of proper provision now". Robertson then said that the commission had heard evidence that among the 75,000 people who lived in what was called "ticketed accommodation", i.e. single room with a small cubic footage, there is a considerable number of decent, industrious poor, but

⁵¹⁹ Se pp xx **TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION**

Binnie insisted that there was sufficient housing available for the respectable poor. Robertson persisted, asking whether if housing could be provided at the rent being paid for ticketed accommodation, £4 or £5 a year, but in ventilated houses with proper sanitation, that would bring in a modest return on the investment, but again Binnie insisted it would “not do good”.⁵²⁰ Another Land Valuator was similarly unenthusiastic, but a Sanitary Inspector, Mr Fife was asked by Robertson, “Do you think, from your general knowledge, that it would pay a company to purchase tenements, consisting of houses of several apartments, and to reconstruct them into workmen’s houses, upon a wise and intelligent plan?” Fyfe replied, “Oh yes, it would pay very well to do that”.

The Commission’s report concluded that

an Association could be conducted profitably, on the footing that the properties are acquired at a moderate price; that they are carefully managed; that the tenants are selected, and efforts made to improve their habits and soften their manners, and to encourage them in the way of well-doing, either by caretakers, or lady visitors. The properties to be dealt with are situated in localities which workers have selected as most suitable and convenient for their requirements. Tenements of this class could be purchased on moderate terms. An Association holding contiguous blocks could manage them more advantageously than a person owning a single tenement. The Commission are supported in this conclusion by what has been accomplished on a small scale by the proprietors of such tenements.⁵²¹

⁵²⁰ 1891 *Report of Commission on the Housing of the Poor in relation to their Social Conditions*, Glasgow (*Presbytery Housing Commission*) p 21

⁵²¹ Ibid

The Commission heard evidence in public sessions held in Hutcheson's Hall, less than a mile from the areas of housing which most concerned it. The hearings were reported fully in the following day's *Glasgow Herald*. The work and report of the Commission will be discussed more fully below, but it is important to point out here that the most thorough examination of witnesses was led by Robertson, as in the case cited of his interrogation of Thomas Binnie. It was he who conducted the principle examination of Dr Russell, the medical officer of health, Andrew Wallace, the Inspector of the Poor for Govan Parish, Messrs Binnie, Smellie and Fyfe on the proposal already mentioned to create an Association to purchase tenements, and it was Robertson who ensured that the statistics presented to the Commission were vividly illustrated by asking the Assistant Sanitary Inspector, Hugh Wood, to describe in detail an average night's work for him. Compared to the evidence of clear preparation which the press reports indicate that Robertson had done, and the depth of his questioning, the contributions to these public sessions of the other members of the Commission, including Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod were insubstantial.

It was Robertson who presented the Commission's report and findings to the Presbytery at a specially convened meeting on 15 April 1891. Robertson again concentrated on the condition of most housing available to those whose income was less than £1 a week. The first formal proposal which he mentioned was the formation of an Association to purchase and renovate property and let it at affordable rents. Second, he commended the proposal for the establishment of labour colonies. Then he referred to the need to provide refuges to provide temporary accommodation for

the decent poor “and take them out of the mass of depraved and dissolute people with whom they were at present compelled to live”.⁵²²

As a result of the Presbytery’s discussion of the report, the Commission was given authority to air the issue of housing conditions in a wider context. A meeting of interested organisations such as the Merchants’ House, the Trades’ House, the Landlords Association, the Trades Council and the Charity Organisation Society, along with representatives of other denominations, the Free, the United Presbyterian and the Episcopal Churches was held on 5 December 1891, chaired by the Lord Provost, and again it was Robertson who spoke to the Commission’s findings, and specifically asked that the meeting create an organisation which would arrange a conference to further take further the concerns of the meeting. That conference was held on 22 March 1892 and was chaired by Robertson. It heard reports from sub-committees which had examined the feasibility, for example, of the establishment of labour centres and a housing association such as Robertson had consistently advocated, and also what forms of recreation ought to be offered in city parks.

On 13 May 1892 a large public meeting was held in the St Andrew’s Halls. Over one hundred leading Churchmen, industrialists, figures from the city’s commercial and public life were on the platform. A large attendance of the public was present to hear the MP, J G A Baird, one of the Bairds of Gartsherrie, move the motion that an Association for improving the conditions of people by means of labour centres, better housing and recreation be formed. Baird said that as a result of the work of the Presbytery “we cannot plead ignorance now”. The motion was seconded by Lord Rosebery, who was the principal speaker of the evening. Rosebery, a Liberal

⁵²² *The Glasgow Herald*, April 16 1891

imperialist, was widely regarded at the time as “the heir apparent to Gladstone”.⁵²³ He had already served a short time as Foreign Secretary in Gladstone’s third administration and was shortly to do so again in his fourth, and was to serve as Prime Minister from 1894-5. When he spoke to the Glasgow meeting he was Chairman of the London County Council. “Things are not as they should be anywhere” Rosebery told the meeting, “but they are still less well than they should be in Glasgow which has taken the lead in this great municipal movement for the raising of the conditions of the working classes”. He was particularly concerned to stress the high death rate, but added that even worse than the death rate was “that helpless, hopeless class.....which cannot and will not work, and breed a race as shiftless and helpless and degraded as themselves”.⁵²⁴ Although on this occasion he seems to have succumbed to the popular view, he was not always inclined to do so. For example in an earlier speech he had “condemned the puritan obsession with the drinking habits of the working class”, perhaps, in part, in an attempt to gain the support of the liquor trade.⁵²⁵

Rosebery was followed by Robertson, who addressed his favourite topic of those “respectable and self-respecting people, many of them fresh from the country, earning sixteen shillings or eighteen shillings a week” and for whom there was no decent housing available. He said that the Churches were working together with the Corporation and civic authorities to organise associations to purchase property, to reconstruct it and to put it in a sanitary condition. Following Robertson’s speech Sir William Arroll proposed that the meeting commend the new association to the

⁵²³ MCKINSTRY, L., 2006, *Rosebery*, London, p 164

⁵²⁴ *The Glasgow Herald*, May 13, 1892

⁵²⁵ MCKINSTRY, *Rosebery*, p 65.

liberality of all and ask for pledges of financial support from those who were prepared to be patrons, pledging £100 in the first twelve months, or guarantors for lesser sums, or annual subscribers. Lord Rosebery was elected President of the Association and Dr Flockhart Robertson its Chairman.

Just over six months later, Robertson died. Perhaps because he did not live, and the work of advocating the improvement of housing within the Church was taken over by Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod in the General Assembly, the part played by Flockart Robertson has not been recognised. His name, however, should be linked with those of Marshall Lang and Macleod, as it was in the General Assembly of 1891, when the report of the Presbytery's Housing Commission was laid on the table. It was Robertson who presented the Report to the General Assembly. Following speeches by Marshall Land and Macleod, the Moderator said that "very rarely in the history of any Parliament or Convention or Assembly had three more able, more well-informed or more thrilling speeches been made upon a more momentous subject, closely touching the deepest welfare of the Church and the land, than the three addresses to which they had just listened".⁵²⁶

The Presbytery of Glasgow's Housing Commission

The Commission initially worked through four committees, one "to collect and classify the information already existing in printed form", a second "to obtain and classify information regarding remedial measures already attempted in Glasgow and elsewhere", a third "to consider the method of procedure and to make arrangements

⁵²⁶ *The Scotsman*, May 28 1891

for the taking of evidence”. The fourth was by far the most important. Its remit was “to select representative blocks of dwellings in Glasgow to be specially visited and reported upon, so as to bring out information as to (1) the wages of the occupiers of single rooms; (2) the rents; (3) the ground annuals or fees payable and the taxes; (4) the habits of the ‘people’ and (5) the returns to the proprietors. Both Marshall Lang and Donald MacLeod were members of this committee,⁵²⁷ which asked Dr Russell of the Sanitary department to select blocks of tenements which were then visited and reported on by the committee, recording the number of people in each house, the occupation and income of the householder, and the cubic footage of the property. The whole Commission took evidence from the Sanitary Department, the Inspectors of Parochial Boards, Landlords and House Factors representatives of the City Improvement Trust, and others in nine public sessions between 16 December 1889 and 20 March 1890. The Commission concluded that improved conditions brought about by the work of the Improvement Trust and the erection by the Corporation of lodging houses had considerably reduced the mortality rate.⁵²⁸ Housing had been constructed but made available for rents considerably higher than could be afforded by those with a weekly wage of £1 or under, whose housing particularly concerned the Commission.

The Commission reported that there were 35,892 one apartment houses in the city, 54,960 two apartment, of which 23,228 were under the special supervision of the Sanitary Department on account of their size in relation to their occupancy by 75,000

⁵²⁷ *Presbytery Housing Commission* p 5

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, p 7

people.⁵²⁹ While the Commission was sitting, the Police Act 1890 was passed. This Act included a provision preventing landlords from altering premises to increase accommodation without permission of the Dean of Guild Court.

In the light of the powers given to the Corporation to insist on improvements to properties, and restrictions on the number of tenants, the Commission considered that there was a danger “that many blocks of buildings occupied by the very poor might be thrown into the market by trustees, bondholders and other persons who were either unable or unwilling to face the expenditure, which in many cases must be considerable, of refitting and reconstructing them”. This the Commission said would be a “calamity” and, as already noted, it proposed that an Association for Providing Improved Dwellings for the Poor” be set up to co-operate with the Police Board to purchase and renew properties.⁵³⁰

The other recommendations of the Housing Commission included a proposal that labour colonies should be set up, where work, such as fishing and basket making, would be provided for those who wanted it because nothing hindered mission work more than unemployment. It is worth noting that the year before the Commission reported, Donald Macleod’s *Good Words* contained an article describing a labour colony in Dumfriesshire.⁵³¹ The Commission also proposed the establishment of “labour reformatories” where those who were regularly found guilty of drunkenness

⁵²⁹ Ibid., p 10 The 75,000 houses under the special attention of the Sanitary Department were those of three rooms or less with a cubic capacity of 2000 cubic feet or less. Their capacity had to be measured, and, making allowance for 300 cubic feet per adult or child over the age of eight, a ticket attached to the door indicating the number of people who could be legally accommodated in the house. These became known as “ticketed houses”.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., pp 19-21

⁵³¹ See above p xx **TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION**

or petty criminality would be sent for one or two years so that they might learn the habit of work. The year before the Commission reported, Charles Booth had published *In Darkest England and The Way Out*. The Commission's report included references to his support for reformatory labour colonies.⁵³² Marshall Lang's Baird Lectures, which we delivered in the same year as the Commission reported and its conclusions published drew heavily on Booth's works.⁵³³ The problem of vagrancy was highlighted and an act to control it proposed.

While the Report of the Commission has rightly been recognised as a considerable advance in the practical expression of a social theology, a number of aspects of the Commission's work and conclusions require to be stressed more than they have been. First, two of the members of the Commission entered caveats. Dr Murray, the Dean of the Faculty of Procurators submitted a very technical memorandum giving reasons why land should not be taxed on its capital value, and William Jolly, the schools Inspector, thought that the Commission had been too influenced by the views of the landlords, and ought to have made the case for municipal housing. The only person who argued before the Commission for municipal housing was Bruce Glazier, the secretary of the Glasgow branch of the Socialist League, and, as already noted, Donald Smith's principal criticism of the commission was that it did not argue for this.⁵³⁴ There is more than a little justification for Jolly's complaint that the vested interests of landlords and factors were given undue attention. In reporting the first meeting of the Commission, the Glasgow Herald, after listing the members of the Commission present, recorded "The Glasgow Landlords Association was represented

⁵³² *Presbytery Housing Commission*, p 30

⁵³³ LANG, *Church and Social Mission*, pp 164,5

⁵³⁴ See above p xx **TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION**

by Mr James Murdoch, writer; and Mr Guthrie Smith, writer, appeared on behalf of the House Factors Association”.⁵³⁵ These two bodies were represented at all the subsequent meetings of the Commission. The Landlords and House Factors Associations not only attended the Commission’s meetings and cross-examined witnesses. They themselves gave evidence to the Commission. At the Commission’s hearing on 8 January 1890, the City Assessor, James Henry, said that he did not entirely blame tenants for the dirty condition of single apartments as tenants did not know whether they were to occupy them for a month or for a longer period, and he suggested that the city’s sanitary department should have the power to size and whitewash premises, the cost of which should be met by a one and a half penny per £1 levy, half to be paid by the landlord and half by the occupier. Guthrie Smith for the House Factors Association then argued that “the effect of the legislation you advocate would be to cause the thrifty, cleanly poor to rely on the sanitary authorities to clean their houses”.

At the same meeting of the Commission, Guthrie Smith was followed by James Danksen, President of the Glasgow Landlords Association, who said that “generally the housing of the working classes is “satisfactory” but in the old city “not what it might be”. It was absurd, he said, to claim as Dr Russell had done, to connect the death rate with single roomed houses. He objected to a proposal which had been raised by the Commission to have caretakers in tenements, and also to the compulsory introduction in every house and flat of WCs and sinks. “There is a class of tenants” he said, “that are very ignorant and destructive, and not only do they not know how to use these conveniences but would be certain to abuse them”. Danksen also said that

⁵³⁵ *The Glasgow Herald*, December 17 1889

his association objected to the Health Committee of the Town Council being given the right to close accommodation it considered uninhabitable without appeal, a power already exercised by the health Committee in Edinburgh. He was not in principle opposed to an association to purchase property and let it at affordable rents, but he rejected municipally provided housing, saying that “is not the legitimate business of a Corporation” and he argued that the City Improvement Trust should be wound up. “Rents could be reduced” Danksen seriously submitted “if all rates, taxes and fees were abolished and the condition of people’s behaviour improved”.⁵³⁶

When Danksen returned to the Commission to be cross examined eight days later, he was severely criticised by Councillor William Smith, who in 1879 had been responsible along with the Chief Officer of Health, Dr Russell, for promoting an order through the Town Council regarding the amount of ventilation required in each house, and who at the time of the Commission’s hearings was a member of the Town Council’s Sanitary Committee. Smith at the outset alleged that Danksen’s evidence had been “entirely an *ex parte* statement in favour of the landlord”, which provoked Donald Macleod to demand that such statements should not be made of someone’s evidence. Smith forcefully questioned Danksen about whether there was a small number of landlords who were “negligent, obstructive and niggardly”, to which Danksen replied “I do not know them but I believe they exist”. Smith asked whether the existing laws were sufficient when it had taken him ten months to have a water closet installed in a house. Danksen thought they were. Smith then questioned Danksen about the quality of complaints about landlords made to the Commission many of which Danksen had said were “trivial” and about whether the Landlords

⁵³⁶ Ibid., January 9 1890

Association put any moral pressure on bad landlords, to which Danksen answered that the Association didn't exist "for moral suasion". Danksen was then asked by Smith about whether the inference, drawn by Dr Russell, of a connection between the death rate and overcrowding was wrong, and Danksen insisted it was. Smith's questioning was certainly vigorous, but it was frequently interrupted by members of the Commission either suggesting that Danksen did not need to answer a question, or alleging that the questioning was unfair or an answer given satisfactory. Donald Macleod, Marshall Lang, Robertson and Paton all intervened in a manner protective of Danksen and critical of Smith. The frequent applause which is referred to in press reports as following both these interventions, and statements made by Danksen suggests that supporters of the landlords were in the public seats. This led one person to point out that applause was unfair as there were those who disagreed with Mr Danksen but who remained silent. The series of exchanges explains why Smith entered the caveat he did, and perhaps justifies the comment of a Mr J. Shaw Maxwell of Elmbank Crescent, who wrote to *The Glasgow Herald*, claiming that representatives of factors, feuars and landlords "have had a remarkably fine innings".⁵³⁷ The Commission's report expressed sympathy for the grievances of the landlords, and in particular their complaints about the wanton destruction of their property by tenants, and the cost to landlords of evicting tenants. However, it balanced this sympathy with callsto force landlords to install sanitation into houses with a hope that tenants could be coerced by law to keep properties clean.⁵³⁸

The second thing to stress about the Commission's work is that its conclusions are very balanced despite the sort of evidence which the Commission heard, not only

⁵³⁷ Ibid., February 5 1890

⁵³⁸ . *Presbytery Housing Commission* p 25

from those with a vested interest in supporting the existing situation, including Danksen, and Land Valuers, Thomas Smellie and Thomas Binnie, but also from James Motion and Andrew Wallace, Inspectors of the Poor for Barony and Govan Parishes respectively. Smellie's and Binnie's evidence with regard to the forming of an Association to purchase property and let it at an affordable rent has already been noted. Smellie also did not believe that the Corporation should have additional powers to insist on structural alterations to property, while Binnie regarded the installation of WCs in small houses in tenements to be detrimental to the health of the tenants. In response to a statement by Binnie that tenants should be educated to appreciate the value of a good house. Lockhart Robertson, from the chair, asked how this could be done. Binnie replied that eviction would teach them the lesson.⁵³⁹

James Motion told the Commission that "a great deal of existing pauperism was due to intemperance, vicious living, early marriages and heredity. It was a rare case to find in the poor house working men or women who had good characters". Questioned by Marshall Lang about his belief that "outdoor relief was demoralising" to the poor, Motion answered that he regarded the statement as "generally right", and in reply to a question from Donald Macleod, he said that "it was anomalous that the law should allow people to bring up illegitimate children to become charges on the rates, without any punishment being inflicted". Andrew Wallace's opinion was that the bulk of pauperism resulted from "drink and other vicious conduct. When Lockhart Robertson queried Wallace's view that sanitary inspectors should have the right to enter a workman's house and examine bedclothes and linen for cleanliness, Wallace insisted that they should have the right to inspect anything they wished, and when William Jolly asked whether it would not improve conditions if lodgers were forbidden,

⁵³⁹ . Ibid., February 24, 1890

Wallace answered that to forbid lodgers would materially decrease the owner's source of income.⁵⁴⁰

Although the Commission disregarded some of this more extreme evidence it must be recognised that the Commission did not entirely avoid some of the frequently expressed views about pauperism being largely due to intemperance. The Commission concluded that it was "strongly impressed with the opinion, stated again and again with precision and distinctness, that drunkenness is the prolific source of the major part of the poverty, wretchedness and discomfort which exist, and the disastrous cause of the wreckage of life. Witness after witness tells with doleful iteration the same tale".⁵⁴¹ In that conclusion, the Commission was taking the view frequently expressed over the years by Marshall Lang and others. However, in an attempt to balance the views of Marshall Lang with those of Donald Macleod, the Commission's report went on:

Drunkenness cannot be regarded as an isolated fact. The question is a grave one, whether poverty with its chilling influences, scanty food and clothing and the miseries of life, lead to drinking; or whether drinking is responsible for these distressing results. It would seem that they mutually act and react on each other. Physical exhaustion and the want of nutritious food, and the discomforts of home life, undoubtedly produce a craving for stimulants. That craving indulged in, no less certainly aggravates the evils all deplore.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴⁰ . Ibid., December 1889

⁵⁴¹ . *Presbytery Housing Commission* p 23

⁵⁴² Ibid., p 24

In dealing with the availability of alcohol, the Commission again strove to maintain a balance between Macleod's and Marshall Lang's differing emphases. It concluded that there were far too many outlets for the sale of spirits, but that restricting the number of public houses was insufficient. "The localities where the poor are housed cannot but produce a depressing effect on the spirits. [sic] There are quarters in the city – sterile, forlorn, and sordid – the grim surroundings of which must exert a baleful influence, an influence no less baleful because it is exerted silently. Men's lives are dull, grey and monotonous, broken only by wild outbursts of dissipation".⁵⁴³ The Commission, thus, accepted the conventional wisdom that drunkenness was the cause of poverty, but it recognised the pastoral sensitivity which Macleod had always sought to express.

The Commission also reiterated the conventional ecclesiastical wisdom that while social conditions required to be improved, to be fully effective they needed to be accompanied by commitment to the Church. It should not be forgotten that the stated reason for setting up the Commission into housing in the first place was not social concern but missionary and evangelical aims which were thought to be hindered by housing conditions. The Commission stated that it could not

but emphatically repeat that, in their judgment, whilst the housing of the poor may be improved and their surroundings made wholesome by the expenditure of time and treasure, these efforts will be futile unless the moral and social habits of the poor are also reformed. This can only be effected by bringing to bear on them outside influences of a moral,

⁵⁴³ Ibid

social and spiritual kind. The Commission, with even more marked emphasis, reaffirm that this work is specially the work of the Christian Church.

It is her high mission to regenerate the world and fashion the social life after a higher pattern.⁵⁴⁴

The Commission however recognised that it had to strike another balance: between the evangelical and social mission of the Church and so it added

The Church, in her mission to the poor, has largely restricted herself to the preaching of the Word and the distribution of doles in the shape of coin or clothing. The preaching of the Word must remain in the forefront for nothing less potent than the virtue of the divine life can lend strength to the enthralled soul to grapple with the passionate impulses which move it to evil; but, combined with the preaching of the Word there must be wise efforts of a social and economic kind.⁵⁴⁵

While clearly the evangelical and social roles of the Church are both being affirmed, it is difficult to escape the impression that, at least in the Commission's report, the latter receives greater emphasis than the former,

The undoubted importance of the Commission's recommendations regarding the establishment of a housing association, the creation of labour colonies and the provision of municipal mortuaries should not obscure the more populist suggestions about labour reformatories and the spectre of vagrancy.

⁵⁴⁴ .Ibid., p 25

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid

It would be unrealistic to expect a Commission at the turn of the twentieth century to have anticipated the present-day belief that in investigating poverty and poor housing, evidence might be sought from those in poverty or living in the sort of housing conditions being examined. It has to be acknowledged, however, that the Commission took quite significantly advanced steps both in ensuring not only that it took evidence with specialist knowledge, but that it obtained first hand experience of housing conditions through the visits of members to housing selected by those with day to day experience. In the evidence heard, moreover, efforts were made to ensure that the plethora of statistics provided and recorded were supplemented by the personal accounts of those who gave evidence. Two specially significant examples should be cited. As has been noted, there was considerable scepticism expressed from some who gave evidence about the value and viability of the sort of housing association which Flockhart Robertson successfully advocated. However, a former Bailie of the city was able to give evidence about his own scheme to purchase and let at low but still profitable rents. Mr Farquhar, a member of the Town Council from 1874 to 1883, and for nine years a member of both the Health Committee and the City Improvement Trust told the Commission that he owned a number of room and kitchen and single apartment houses. "He purchased a property (in Bell Street) set it in thorough order, and substituted iron bedsteads for the enclosures which formerly served the purpose. He spent fully half the original costs in these improvements, but having acquitted the property at a moderate price, he had no doubt it would be a profitable investment".⁵⁴⁶ When Hugh Wood, the Assistant Sanitary Inspector, gave evidence, he submitted a table showing the results of the previous year's inspection

⁵⁴⁶ *The Glasgow Herald*, January 7 1890

of ticketed houses. Flockhart Robertson then asked him for “an account of your experiences in the course of a night’s work”. Wood reported on a visit to 2 South Stirling Street where there were 20 dwellings, 8 single apartment and 12 two apartment. All the single apartments had been converted from previously much larger homes.

There were no sanitary conveniences provided in these homes. The first house visited was that of a labourer in which were the tenant and his wife and two children and the wife’s brother. The man and his wife and the two children lay on the floor in a recess bed in the wall, and the wife’s brother lay in a corner with a sack to cover him. There was very little furniture in the house. The house only contained cubic space for 2 ½ adults and the inmates were equal to 4 adults.

Wood went on in similar vein to describe conditions in seven other houses he visited in that one night.

A special meeting of Presbytery was held on 15 April 1892 to receive the report of the Housing Commission. The debate which took place illustrates the extent to which the Presbytery’s interest in housing was confined to a few individuals, led by Marshall Lang, Macleod and Robertson. After Robertson had introduced the report, Donald Macleod spoke, highlighting the problem of what he called “an army of 135,000 vagrants, living on the alms often extorted by false representation and not infrequently by threats”. John Macleod of Govan then spoke about the Commission’s advocacy of public mortuaries and Marshall Lang said that he thought it was fruitless to discuss “the abstract question” of whether the poor house led to the public house or the public

house to the poor house”.⁵⁴⁷ There were only two other speakers. Robert Thomson moved that the Presbytery declare the Commission’s report deficient because it did not examine the causes of the housing crisis, but his motion failed to find a seconder, and William Brownlie, the minister of Lenzie who claimed that “wages had gone up but rents had not gone up, and the working people had acquired habits of luxury”.

The United Free Church and the Municipal Housing Commission

In 1900, the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church united to form the United Free Church of Scotland. Two years later, following on the work of the Presbytery’s Housing Commission, the Lord Provost of Glasgow set up a Municipal Commission, which reported in July 1904. There were a number of palliative measures proposed for the improvement of existing housing, but the principal major recommendations were that the Corporation itself should obtain statutory powers “providing for a less cumbrous, expensive and dilatory process of acquiring property for clearing and housing purposes”.⁵⁴⁸ The most serious overcrowding in Glasgow was caused by what were called “back lands”, a tenement built in what was intended to be the open space behind another tenement. Specifically the demolition of all “back-lands” was urgently proposed “by steady, continuous and rigorous enforcement of the existing powers of the Corporation; and that powers should be obtained, if necessary, to prevent back lands, which have been closed against human habitation, being used as stores or other business premises”.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., April 16 1892

⁵⁴⁸ *Recommendations of Glasgow Municipal Commission on the Housing of the Poor (GMC), 1904, p 20, XIIG*

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid

The Commission recognised that if its recommendations with regard to back lands, to increasing the minimum cubic footage permissible for a one roomed house, to preventing the occupation of insanitary premises, and to a more rigorous use of the corporation's powers to prevent overcrowding were all to be carried out, there was likely to be a considerable amount of hardship. Several thousand people would be made homeless. The Commission therefore recommended the building "of tenements of one and two apartments, to be reserved exclusively for respectable people of the 'poorest class'.....preference being given to those dispossessed and to the most necessitous. It was the Commission's view that one or two roomed houses to be let at very low rent would produce an income capable of paying all economic charges. For those who were considered "dissolute" much simpler basic accommodation was recommended by the Commission, so long as prospective tenants showed evidence of the willingness to reform. While the Presbytery of Glasgow's Housing Commission had not proposed municipal housing, it had heard considerable evidence that low rented housing would be an economic proposition and it is reasonable to conclude that the proposal of the Lord Provost's Municipal Commission was the extension of the scheme which had been widely aired in evidence of and discussion in the report of the Presbytery's Housing Commission.

The Church of Scotland Presbytery did not give direct evidence to the Lord Provost's Commission, though several members of the municipal commission were elders of the Church. However the Lord Provost's Commission provides some evidence of the United Free Church's attitude to housing. for the United Free Church Presbytery submitted evidence⁵⁵⁰ and two ministerial members from the Free Church tradition of

⁵⁵⁰ *GMC Minutes*, May 22 1903

the now United Free Church Presbytery, Revd Gilbert Laurie of Fairbairn U.F. Church in the eastern area of Bridgeton, and Revd William Ross of Cowcaddens gave verbal evidence in support of the formal submission of the United Free Church Presbytery. which was examined by members of the Commission Although at its meeting on 6th May 1902 the United Free Church Presbytery had “resolved to ask that the Presbytery be represented on the Municipal Commission on the housing of the poor”,⁵⁵¹ the Presbytery itself did not submit evidence but remitted it to Laurie and Ross, and two other ministers, Robert Campbell and James Law to give evidence, but only Laurie and Ross did.⁵⁵²

Laurie gave evidence that in his experience there was a “very large number” of able bodied men, paid less than £1 per week who found it very difficult to find housing at affordable rent,⁵⁵³ and of “decent, poor people who could afford, say, 9s a month [who] cannot get these houses”.⁵⁵⁴ He was of the view that the Corporation should provide some housing⁵⁵⁵ for those who cannot pay more than 10s a month for a single room. This proposal came under severe criticism from Professor Glaister, who had been a member of the Church of Scotland Presbytery of Glasgow’s housing commission, on the grounds that land could not be obtained sufficiently cheaply to make this an economic possibility. Nonetheless, it received support in the Commission.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵¹ Minutes of the United Free Church Presbytery of Glasgow, CH3/146/44

⁵⁵² Ibid., p 406 January 1903,

⁵⁵³ *GMC Evidence*, Qq 12482,3

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., Qq 12565

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., Qq 12567

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., Qq 12592

Laurie's evidence was very critical of landlords, insisting that those who charged 10s a month and more for "single rooms with bare walls" were considerably overcharging, and that property which had become dilapidated in the quarter of a century since Laurie came to Glasgow had risen in rent.⁵⁵⁷ Landlords permitted overcrowding; indeed, Laurie described a single tenement occupied by 120 people.⁵⁵⁸ Tenements built in back lands could not be inhabited with any decency.⁵⁵⁹ There were also underground dwellings which, in Laurie's view were insanitary and were not visited by sanitary inspectors.⁵⁶⁰ Landlords did not provide adequate factoring of their accommodation which resulted in undesirable tenants being allowed free rein. There ought to be far more protection for "the decent, quiet, respectable poor".⁵⁶¹ Laurie proposed that there ought to be a Fair Rents Court, along the lines of the provision for assessing the rental of crofts or assessments of urban property. Laurie was as critical of the Churches' lack of involvement as he was of the landlords' approach to their responsibilities.

I had enormous faith in education before the [1872] bill was passed, and I thought that here was salvation; but I find that education does not in the slightest degree touch this question. I find this, that one-third or one-fourth of my people have been reclaimed, not by education, but by the Gospel. Then I find that there is a great deal in the way of coming in and distributing charity.....A congregation should deal with their own people; help the congregation to help the poor but do not put in a wedge between the pastor and his congregation and people. If this Commission could by any means awaken our Churches to grapple with that question they would

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., Qq 12486,7

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., Qq 12490

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., Qq 12495

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., Qq 12502

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., Qq 12478

be going a long way to solve the question.⁵⁶²

This represents not only Laurie's personal opinion. In the precognition statement, submitted in the name of the Presbytery, but never approved by it,⁵⁶³ the statement is made: "The Churches have been neglecting their duty, and have not been grappling with this section of the people as they should do. They have been for many years standing aside and leaving this portion of the people to any society that chooses to deal with it. The Churches ought to tackle this piece of work vigorously".⁵⁶⁴ Under examination by the Commission, Laurie made it clear that what he meant by the Churches neglecting their duty is the failure to operate efficiently the territorial system. He was asked how the Churches could help the Corporation tackle the housing problem:

I have no doubt whatever that would be done if we followed the old Scotch method of parochial work. The people are perfectly open to personal dealing. I know nothing better than Dr Chalmers' territorial work. Take a limited number. We have been working after the imperial idea, and it is sheer nonsense. We are spending money and energy in taking the city into our arms. We should just say 'Here is a district; let us work it.' If the Churches were to do that it would pay and raise the people.⁵⁶⁵

Laurie was asked the question which had concerned the Church of Scotland Presbytery's Housing Commission, and on which Donald Macleod and Marshall Lang

⁵⁶² Ibid., 12526

⁵⁶³ *GMC Minutes* p 116

⁵⁶⁴ *GC Evidence* Qq 12478 III

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., Qq 12551

had differing views, whether drink was the cause or the effect of poor housing and squalid conditions or the effect. He took the view that it was “sometimes a cause and sometimes an effect. I certainly think that drink is the most powerful element, but at the same time if you don’t put people into a position where they can breathe fresh air, then that works into drinking”.⁵⁶⁶ However, Laurie later explained that while he recognised the significance of drinking, which, he said, was prevalent “among those who win good wages”, he was concerned about the housing available for those on small incomes. “The class I am aiming at, which I think has most need, is the class composed of mill girls, widows, and old people, who do not drink, a very large class who are suffering through downright poverty, and who are not brought down by drink, who are unable to pay the price demanded just now for a room or a room and a kitchen.....and who are unable to pay the price demanded just now for a room or a room and kitchen”⁵⁶⁷

The other member of the Free Church Presbytery to give evidence to the Municipal Commission was William Ross, minister of Cowcaddens. His experience in the north of the city made him less enthusiastic for the work of the City Improvement Trust than the Church of Scotland Presbytery’s Housing Commission had been. Ross’s son wrote “The worst day, socially and morally, for the district came when the City Improvement Trust cleared out a large number of the dens and rookeries in the region of the Saltmarket. The people who inhabited them were forced to find another shelter, and many of them trekked north-west and settled down in the Cowcaddens district”.⁵⁶⁸ Ross disagreed with his colleague Gilbert Laurie on the question of whether drink was

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., Qq 12552

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., Qq 12603,4

⁵⁶⁸ Ross, J. M. E., 1905, *Ross of Cowcaddens*, LONDON, p 88
Ibid.,p 163

a cause or an effect of squalor. “Drink is in the smallest possible degree an effect, so small that it is scarcely worth mentioning”⁵⁶⁹ Ross however was a lifelong supporter of temperance. He became Secretary of the Free Church Temperance Society which was revived in 1874, and held high office in the temperance movement’s Order of Templars, serving as Grand Templar and Chief Templar for the World. He also served as Convener of the Free Church’s Temperance Committee.

Ross became minister of Cowcaddens Free Church in 1883, after a long ministry in Rothesay. His background and interests clearly committed him to recognising the influence of drink as the cause of social deprivation. While he was always willing to express his temperance convictions, his social involvement was by no means restricted to the rhetoric of blame. During his ministry a medical mission was based in his Church and in ten years over forty thousand people, who did not necessarily have any connection with Cowcaddens Free Church, were treated free of charge by Dr Muir Smith who was available every Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoon. He had the frequent assistance of medical students.

In his evidence, Ross described other experiments in social involvement which he called “pioneer mission”, where two women were paid to settle in the heart of slum communities which experienced a frequent turnover of population “because, as the people improve, they remove elsewhere to more comfortable quarters. The results have been very remarkable, so much so that if I had the means, I would establish a mission in every slum district like that”⁵⁷⁰. While it is clear that Ross’s eventual aim is to encourage involvement with the Church, it is equally clear that he saw social

⁵⁶⁹ *GMC Evidence* Qq 12658)

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Qq 12663

involvement and improvement as a step towards this in its own right. Ross advocated other social improvements: the municipal provision of libraries,⁵⁷¹ the creation of savings banks⁵⁷² and believed that tenants should be allowed, where they wished, to purchase their houses at a slight increase on the annual rent.⁵⁷³

Ross began his long precognition statement to the Municipal Commission by outlining what he regarded as the five principal causes of “the lamentable condition of things.....The first and most important of these causes is unquestionably the drink system, consisting of drinking customs and the drinking trade”. He claimed that in the forty years of his ministry in Cowcaddens, “upwards of forty thousand people [a figure separate from those said to have attended the medical mission] have come into Cowcaddens Church to take the temperance pledge, and with a desire to escape from the thralldom of drink and the sad consequences that follow”.⁵⁷⁴ Ross wanted a series of curbs on the drink trade including a sharp increase in the tax assessment on public houses,⁵⁷⁵ a ban on the granting of licenses in new buildings,⁵⁷⁶ and encouragement to proprietors to refuse tenancies to anyone employed in the drink trade.⁵⁷⁷ “All inspectors, caretakers, medical men and others occupying official positions shall be abstainers”.⁵⁷⁸ In addition to drink, Ross listed as factors contributing to social deprivation the lack of space, thriftlessness, heredity and hopelessness.⁵⁷⁹ In his evidence Ross advocated the destruction of slum property and rebuilding on the

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., Qq 12654 III, 4

⁵⁷² Ibid., III, 5

⁵⁷³ Ibid., III, 6

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., Qq 12654

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., Qq 12671-4

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., Qq 12692

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., Qq 12696.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., Qq 12654, III, 3

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., Qq 12654. IV.3

sites.⁵⁸⁰ Ideally Ross wanted new housing to be built by wealthy philanthropists.⁵⁸¹ 2
He also supported municipal housing and, only as a last resort, the establishment of a large-scale co-operative society.

In a number of areas, the evidence presented by the United Free Church Presbytery through the testimony of Laurie and Ross contrasts with the views of the Church of Scotland's Presbytery in the report it adopted from its Housing Commission. First, the scale of the work done differs considerably. The United Free Church Presbytery relied on the experience of the two men who gave evidence to the Municipal Commission, while the Church of Scotland Presbytery's Commission, as we have seen, included people of expertise and influence and took evidence from a wide selection of interested parties. The extent and breadth of the Church of Scotland's Commission's report may, however, have had a drawback which contributed to a second area in which the two Churches' positions can be contrasted.

Precisely because the Church of Scotland's Housing Commission contained prominent businessmen and provided facilities for Landlords and Factors Associations to be present, its final report shows evidence of its reluctance to be severely critical of those who administered houses for let. The two men who gave evidence on behalf of the Free Church Presbytery to the Lord Provost's Commission clearly felt no constraint in being acutely critical of landlords. Gilbert Laurie expressly agreed that he sided with the tenants against the landlords and that rents were generally unfair because they were too high,⁵⁸² and frequently badly factored.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 12704-12713

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., Qq 12654.IV.

⁵⁸² Ibid., Qq 12572, 3

⁵⁸³ Ibid., Qq 12478 I, 5

Where a house was “filthy and miserable”, Laurie told the Commission, “I say that the fault lies, in the first instance, with the factor or the person who manages the property”.⁵⁸⁴ William Ross singled out the frequent charging of high rents for unhealthy properties⁵⁸⁵ and advocated the radical step of making landlords entirely responsible for the good conduct of those to whom they let houses.⁵⁸⁶

While fact that the evidence from the United Free Church relied heavily on the experience of individuals enabled it to focus its criticisms more sharply perhaps than the Church of Scotland’s Commission was able to do, it had the drawback of enabling William Ross to concentrate so heavily on the question of drink and he did not develop to the same extent other practical proposals he made. These he regarded as of secondary importance. The final report of the Lord Provost’s Housing Commission recognised “the close connection there is between the unhappy condition in which thousands of their fellow-citizens are housed and the drinking habits in which so many of them indulge” and it concluded that “improved housing conditions seem all but hopeless while this state of matters prevails”. It recommended that “the number of licensed houses in working class districts should be greatly lessened, and that the granting of licenses in new districts should be discouraged.”⁵⁸⁷ As this was the penultimate recommendation of the Commission it is difficult to avoid the impression that there was something of the payment of lip service in its inclusion.

A very significant point of contrast between the conclusions of the Church of Scotland Commission and the evidence from the United Free Church Presbytery lies

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., Q 12532

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., Qq 12569

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., Qq 12691

⁵⁸⁷ *GMCR recommendations* XVIII

in the attitude towards the Church. The Church of Scotland Presbytery of Glasgow's Housing Commission barely mentions any criticism of the Church at all, whereas both Laurie and Ross make a major point of it. William Ross criticised the Church of Scotland because its congregations "would not take the trouble" to become involved in social problems⁵⁸⁸ while the United Free Church, "not supported by the State.....has just enough to do to preserve its own organisation and cannot afford, so to speak, to take the necessary steps to meet the condition of things. Anything the United Free Church had been able to do had been done "by the aid of generous and Christian people who had compassion on that class of the population".⁵⁸⁹ Ross was particularly scathing about "west end congregations who play at missions to relieve their own consciences. Their visitors go about, *not with the object of raising the community, but with the object of doing what they say is Christian work. They pay and provide charity out of pure sympathy without regard to causes, to righteousness or the results, and they make people dependent*".⁵⁹⁰ [My emphasis] Ross's comment that the charitable efforts of these west end congregations produced a dependency culture raises the possibility that his concentration on the issue of drink, and his advocacy of solutions with little chance of implementation, distracted from more critical comments on deprivation. The distinction he appears to be making between "raising the community" (such as was seen in his evidence of the effect of his 'pioneer missions') and "Christian work" was an important one which deserved more attention than it seems to have received.

The evidence given by Gilbert Laurie and William Ross was not the only contribution of the United Free Church to the Lord Provost's Commission on Housing, Revd

⁵⁸⁸ MHC Evidence Q 12742

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., Q 127

Robert Howie, minister of St Mary's U.F. Church in Govan was a member of the Municipal Housing Commission. Howie had been close to Robert Buchanan, and was ordained and inducted as minister of the Wynd in 1860. In two years he had built up the numbers from one hundred and ten when he arrived to over seven hundred. He moved to another area close by, to establish Trinity Free Church, which began life with over four hundred members from the Wynd.⁵⁹¹ In 1872 he was persuaded by the wealthy shipowner, John Stephen to establish a Church in Govan, St Mary's. While there, he was involved in the starting a total of forty four new congregations, whose buildings cost in excess of £300,000. Howie was convener of the Free Church General Assembly's Home Mission Committee from 1897.

Robert Howie's concern to reach the unchurched is seen not only in his involvement in considerable Church extension, but in the study he undertook of those throughout Scotland who had no Church connection⁵⁹² and which estimated that in the city of Glasgow there were 420,000 "Churchless". He was to make use of his statistical ability in arguing for a different approach to house building than those the Municipal Commission was eventually to recommend.

The minutes of the Housing Commission refer to two attempts by Howie to have the Commission's eventual findings altered in two significant ways, both of them unsuccessful. First, he failed to have a recommendation that the Corporation should provide one or two lodging houses in different districts of the city for "poor couples"⁵⁹³ altered to include a stipulation that the couples be married.⁵⁹⁴ Second, he

⁵⁹¹ WALKER, N.L., 1895, *Chapters from the History of the Free Church of Scotland*, Edinburgh, p 86

⁵⁹² HOWIE, R., 1893, *The Churches and the Churchless*, Glasgow

⁵⁹³ *GMC Recommendations* IV.4

⁵⁹⁴ *GMC Minutes* 4 July 1904, p 198

also failed to persuade the Commission to include a recommendation that it would be preferable to build municipal housing in the suburbs rather than in inner-city areas. When the Commission's final recommendations were being drawn up, Howie asked that his signature should bear a caveat that he approved only with reservations that this proposal had been dismissed as "irrelevant".⁵⁹⁵ When this was refused, he declined to sign the report.

The Glasgow Herald published a letter from Howie on 1 August 1904. In it he argued that the Commission should have paid more attention to the statistics of migration to the suburbs. In the ten years before additional suburban districts were annexed to the city, the population of the city had risen, by 10.27% from 565,710 to 623,829. In the same period the population of the suburban areas added had risen by 49.29% from 92,363 to 137,883, and the population of some parishes within Glasgow (Glasgow, Govan, Eastwood, Cathcart and Rutherglen) had dropped by 219,556 or 34.16%. Howie claimed in his letter that if the Corporation secured ground in the suburbs for municipal housing, then the ratepayers and not private landowners would benefit from the increased value of the land which would follow the extension of the tramways system to these areas. The Corporation would therefore be able to build cheaper houses than it could in the inner city, where more existing housing would become available for let as people moved out to the suburbs. Howie produced figures which showed that the demand for larger accommodation within the city was decreasing and was being fully met by private enterprise.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 14 October p 206

Conclusion

It is perhaps unfair to suggest that writers on this period have exaggerated the part played by Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang in awakening the social conscience of the Church of Scotland, establishing the Presbytery of Glasgow's Housing Commission, and publicising its work nationally. The part they played was extremely significant. Both men were national figures of considerable importance and reputation. Both were to become Moderators of the General Assembly. Macleod was an outstanding preacher and orator and Marshall Lang was a powerful intellectual. They were able, therefore, to command attention and respect for the Housing Commission, and, equally important, for the social theology which lay behind it.

The part played by Frederick Lockhart Robertson has been almost totally ignored in the literature of the Housing Commission. Only David Watson even mentions his chairing of the Commission.⁵⁹⁶ As has been shown, his contribution to the cause of better housing for Glasgow went far beyond that. Robertson clearly did not possess the oratorical gifts of Donald Macleod or the intellectual credentials of Marshall Lang, but his determination and organizational ability were essential to the Housing Commission's work. The evidence given to the Commission reveals the extent to which Robertson piloted through its most widely accepted and effective recommendation, the proposal for a housing association, which resulted in the Glasgow Workmen's Dwelling Company, with a capital of over £40,000 and a dividend limited to 5%. It bought and renovated twenty six slum properties and was responsible for erecting six new tenements. Tenants were largely unskilled labourers

⁵⁹⁶ WATSON, *Social Problems*, p 33

earning around £1 per week. The Company owned 677 houses providing accommodation for 2900 people.⁵⁹⁷

The subsequent history of the wider support given to the Housing Commission's proposals, first through ecumenical conference and then in a huge public rally, and Robertson's tireless involvement in that process has not been fully recorded. . It is very obvious that while Robertson was active in the year or so after the public meeting in the St Andrew's Halls, the work delegated to committees went ahead at some pace, but with Robertson's illness and then death, the pace slowed considerably.

The reputation which Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang had at the time has allowed the assumption to be made that the Housing Commission was a reflection of the Presbytery of Glasgow's commitment to the social theology which the two men promoted. However there is evidence of considerable apathy in the Presbytery when housing was under discussion, and there is certainly no evidence that the Kirk Sessions who were asked, first for comments and later for discussion of the issues involved took on the work with any great seriousness.

The concentration on the part played by Macleod and Marshall Lang has had another consequence: the assumption that the Presbytery's Housing Commission was a committee composed of members of the Presbytery, a fact which C.G. Brown notes in passing.⁵⁹⁸ It included, as has been noted, men who were not members of the Presbytery, but whose expertise was sought on behalf of the Presbytery. This does not detract from the credit which the Presbytery deserves for setting up the

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., p 44

⁵⁹⁸ BROWN, C.G., "To be aglow with civic ardours" in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, XXVI, 1996, p 189

Commission; on the contrary, it reveals its determination to give the Commission's work and eventual proposals both authority and credibility. It is significant that while Marshall Lang proposed that there should be an ecumenical dimension to the Commission, it was F. L. Robertson's motion which secured that people with professional experience of housing, health and sanitation were members of the Commission.

Donald Smith's comment that the Commission's recommendations were "disappointing" and that members of the Commission "rejected socialist proposals that the corporation build houses and let them to the poor at rents they could afford"⁵⁹⁹ is too dismissive. It downplays the impetus which the Commission's recommendations gave to the public debate on the housing issue. It ignores the support which the Commission gave to other forms of municipal involvement in housing, such as lodging houses. And it fails to recognise that the final recommendations of the Commission show that it was prepared to ignore a good deal of the conventional argument, for example about the contribution of drink to poverty.

There was more than a little ecclesiastical self-interest in the proposal to set up a housing commission. Bad housing was perceived to be one of the main causes of what was termed "non Church-going" and the Church of Scotland Presbytery's initial interest in the housing issue was with a view to improving Church attendance, and, the moral issues raised by the difficulty of maintaining "decency" in single room houses.

⁵⁹⁹ SMITH, *Passive Obedience*, p 237 n

It is true that the Commission allowed representatives of the professional associations of landlords and house factors to be represented at all the meetings of the Commission and to comment on evidence given to the Commission with which they disagreed, and to that extent the Commission's work is open to the charge that it was unduly sympathetic to the position of the landlords. This is one of the areas in which the evidence of the Church of Scotland Presbytery differs from the evidence of the Free Church Presbytery to the Municipal Housing Commission. There was no-one in the Free Church in Glasgow of the stature of Macleod or Marshall Lang or with the dogged commitment of F L Robertson. The United Free Church Presbytery did not prepare its evidence on housing conditions as assiduously as did the Church of Scotland Presbytery. The United Free Church Presbytery at this time was more concerned to debate the issues surrounding the theological views of A. B. Bruce and Marcus Dods.

Gilbert Laurie and William Ross were far from reluctant to criticise landlords and place blame for housing conditions at their door. They were also less impressed than the Church of Scotland's Commission with the work of the City Improvement Trust.

If the Church of Scotland's Commission disappointed Donald Smith because it rejected the provision of municipal housing, the same charge cannot be levelled at the Free Church Presbytery's contribution to the Municipal Housing Commission, which Smith does not acknowledge. Robert Howie of the United Free Church proposed municipal land purchase and house building. Perhaps because of William Ross' temperance background, stress on the effect of drink was much more to the fore in the Free Church's submission to the Municipal Commission.

With the death of F. L. Robertson, and the involvement of Macleod and Marshall Lang on the wider stage of the Church of Scotland's General Assembly, the focus of the Church's attention to the housing problem moved from Glasgow Presbytery to the General Assembly, while in the west of Scotland, the exploration of social theology was taken up by ministers of the United Free Church, William Dickie of Dowanhill⁶⁰⁰ in the west end of Glasgow, and Scott Matheson of Dumbarton, (from the United Presbyterian tradition) William Clow (from the Free Church tradition) and David Watson, who combined the practical commitment of a Church of Scotland minister in the east end of Glasgow with the ability of an able theological mind.

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Chapter 5

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL REFORM

Introduction

In 1909, the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church in 1909 took the first official steps towards reunion. A conference of two hundred and ten representatives of the two Churches took place on 9th November 1909.⁶⁰¹ On St Andrew's Day 1900, exactly three weeks after the first meeting of representatives to explore the issues involved in reunion, another conference between the two Churches took place to review the social work of the two Churches. By 1909, there had already been co-operation between the Churches in the field of social work, for example in response to the welfare needs of those in Glasgow affected by the down-turn in trade that year. The Church of Scotland had opened a Labour Home for destitute men in Edinburgh. This was shortly followed by similar homes in Glasgow, Dundee and Ayr. The Church of Scotland established a firewood factory in Glasgow, so that when its homes were full, men could work a four hour shift to earn sufficient money for two meals and a ticket for a bed in a model lodging house. Every night after midnight, five hundred men were fed under a railway arch in the east end of the city at a soup kitchen run by the Church. Homes for destitute young men were opened in Glasgow and Paisley, as well as in Dundee and Aberdeen. Bureaux for unemployed women were opened in Glasgow and Edinburgh and a farm acquired at Bridge of Allan to train unemployed young men for farm work. Although the United Free Church had not made the same progress in practical social work, it

⁶⁰¹ MURRAY, D.M., 2000, *Rebuilding the Kirk*, Edinburgh, p 35

was decided, as a result of the conference, that there was a danger of work being duplicated, and so it was decided that the Church of Scotland should continue to put its emphasis on practical social work, while the United Free Church would become more involved in social theology and social criticism.⁶⁰²

Towards the end of his survey of social criticism in the Scottish Churches, Donald Smith concludes that “the U.F. Church was the first of the Scottish Churches to recover, in its corporate capacity, its prophetic witness, and to engage in genuine and consistent social criticism”.⁶⁰³ Smith traces in some detail the debates which took place in the United Free Church General Assembly between 1906 and 1911 and which led to establishment of a Special Committee on Social Problems which, according to its terms of reference,

by conference with Presbyteries, employers, masters’ federations, Chambers of Commerce, Trades Councils and other labour organisations, would keep the Church informed on industrial and social problems. It would arrange for the presentation and discussion of labour and social questions from the Christian point of view at meetings of existing organisations, wherever opportunities arose.....It would negotiate for the formation, for joint action where possible, of joint committees of Presbytery and other organisations which strive for the welfare of the various classes of the community.....It would keep a watchful eye on Social Legislation, get in touch, as occasion arises, with such Departments of State as the Local Government Board,

⁶⁰² REITH, G., (Ed) 1911 *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland*, Edinburgh, Reports p 5 (*Proceedings and Debates*)

⁶⁰³ SMITH, *Passive Obedience*, p 340-341

the Board of Trade and the Home Office.⁶⁰⁴

The reports and proceedings of the U.F. Assembly, culminating in the establishment of the Committee on Social Problems also, as Smith points out, “reveal the strong cleavage that had by this time developed between the progressive and conservative elements in the Church – between those who wished the Church to work for a reformation of the social and economic structures of society in order to achieve a more Christian social order, and those who held the Church’s only task was to preach the Gospel to individuals, leaving it to redeemed individuals to create a more Christian society”.⁶⁰⁵ What is important, for the purposes of this study, is to trace how the U.F. Church’s increasing involvement in social questions was expressed through the use of the idea of the Kingdom of God, and how the cleavage in the Church’s attitude between the progressive and conservative elements derived from differing, and often somewhat confused views on the Kingdom of God.

Inevitably the reports to the United Free Church’s General Assembly are less definite about the Kingdom of God than the views of the individuals whose often conflicting opinions the Reports had to reconcile. It is clear that there was a variety of views about the Kingdom of God being propounded at the beginning of the twentieth century. These are explored through the writings of four ministers who lived and worked in the West of Scotland, whose congregations and parishes were very different, whose motivations varied considerably, and who represent the spectrum of views on the Kingdom which the United Free Church’s General Assembly attempted to hold together,

⁶⁰⁴ REITH., 1911, *Proceedings and Debates, Reports*

⁶⁰⁵ SMITH, *Passive Obedience*, p 341

David Watson was a Church of Scotland minister in the east end of Glasgow. He combined an intense pastoral concern with an ability to reflect on the theological and pastoral issues of social justice in a deprived area. William Clow came from the Free Church tradition of the United Free Church and his pastoral charge was a newly establish congregation in Glasgow's west end where both socially and politically he was at home, and his social theology reflected the individualism and the confidence of Glasgow's merchant class. Scott Matheson and William Dickie both came from the former United Presbyterian Church. Matheson was a town centre minister in Dumbarton and linked the benefits of municipalisation to the value of civic religion, while Dickie's congregation had transported from an urban area to the then suburbs, and he himself struggled to combine the evangelical emphasis on individual salvation with the local Church's social concern.

An examination of their respective social theologies will illustrate the variety of views about the Kingdom of God which the General Assembly of the United Free Church struggled to describe and so provide a context for its social criticism. It was being pressed to decide whether the Church's role in advancing the Kingdom of God was an active, participatory one in which the Church provided the means to attempt to reduce poverty and homelessness; or whether it should adopt an inspirationally participative role, working to produce Christian people who would carry the social implications of the Gospel into the places where they had influence; or whether the Church had an institutionally prophetic role, critical of all it regarded as retarding the Kingdom of God. These roles were not, of course, mutually exclusive, and indeed it would have been possible for the Church to adopt all three roles, but different social theologies often appeared to adopt one of these roles at the expense, almost, of the others

David Watson

David Watson was minister of the parish of St Clement's in the east end of Glasgow for forty two years. In 1886 he was called to what was then a chapel-of-ease with a membership of three hundred, and by the time he celebrated his semi-jubilee there in 1911, the congregation numbered well over one thousand.⁶⁰⁶ S J Brown describes St Clement's under Watson as "a model urban working class Church".⁶⁰⁷ Two experiences fired Watson's social concern. When he was a student at the University of Glasgow, the Liberal MP John Bright was elected Rector of the University. Watson was present at Bright's Rectorial Address and later said that he would never forget Bright's final sentence, "I see before me men, women and children, hungry, ill-clothed, wan and wretched, passing on in never-ending and ghastly procession from the cradle into the grave". Watson said that Bright's speech "made him a housing reformer".⁶⁰⁸ The other experience which convinced Watson of the need for housing reform was the time he spent as probationer minister in Paisley, in the same congregation and parish where Robert Burns had been minister. Watson wrote "It was while visiting from door to door in the poorer parts of the parish that I came up against the housing problem and the slums of Paisley, which were terrible beyond anything I had seen in Glasgow".⁶⁰⁹ Watson wrote a series of unsigned articles for *The Paisley Gazette*.

I told what I had seen – dark hovels, damp walls, rotting floors,
dripping roofs, unsafe stairs with greasy ropes for banisters up which
I had to pull myself – many of them overcrowded with aged men and

⁶⁰⁶ WATSON, D., 1936, *Chords of Memory*, Edinburgh p 66

⁶⁰⁷ BROWN, S.J., 2006, "Watson, David (1859-1943) *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Ed Lawrence Goldman, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/92318>, accessed December 26 2006

⁶⁰⁸ WATSON, *Chords of Memory*, pp 46, 47

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p 57

women, delicate consumptive young men, palefaced bloodless women, and puny children, most of them subsisting on a miserable pittance. That was how the Paisley poor lived, within a hundred yards of decent streets and comfortable homes. I gave abundant instances and pictures from life. The articles appeared every Saturday for several weeks and created a sensation.⁶¹⁰

David Watson had great respect for Robert Flint⁶¹¹ and he also had strong links to both John Marshall Lang and Donald Macleod.⁶¹² The names of both Flint and Marshall Lang appear in advertisements commending one of Watson's books. Watson's parish was close to the Barony, and Watson was a considerable admirer of Marshall Lang, whom he described as among "the outstanding platform speakers in Glasgow" and who was "marked by intense moral force".⁶¹³ Watson says that Donald Macleod and Park Parish were among those who helped him in the early years of his ministry. The Park congregation not only financed a parish sister and provided a considerable number of the lady volunteers, who were a customary way of better-off congregations helping poorer parishes, but Watson also received support from a prominent Glasgow accountant, and leading elder in Park Church, A. J. Ferguson, who became a close friend.

"During the first twenty years of his St Clement's ministry" writes Donald H Bishop,

Dr Watson visited regularly and gave brief addresses at many of the iron, brass, electricity, cotton and jam factories in his parish.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid, pp 57-8

⁶¹¹ Ibid., p 109

⁶¹² Ibid., p 67,68

⁶¹³ .Ibid., p 46

The addresses were heartily welcomed by the employers.....The workers responded readily and attended the meetings, leading Dr Watson to report to the Kirk Session (in May 1906) that his ‘visits to the Public Works in the district had been very successful, the members present and attention given being most encouraging’.⁶¹⁴

Watson became closely involved with the Charity Organisation Society⁶¹⁵ and he was instrumental in founding the Scottish Christian Social Union, and was its President from 1901 to 1938. He was active in the Church of Scotland Presbytery of Glasgow’s Committee on Social Problems, and in 1907, when the Committee was investigating lodging houses and farmed out houses, Watson personally visited both each night for a week, between 9.00pm and 2.00am, if not in disguise then certainly not recognisable as a minister. He was later to describe the farmed out houses as “in many instances a brothel, pure and simple)⁶¹⁶ One of the results was Glasgow Presbytery’s Lodging House Mission, which had considerable success in providing meals and welfare services, and continues to do so to this day.⁶¹⁷

In 1909, following trade depression and consequent unemployment, the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church in Glasgow combined to raise funds to meet the needs of those in distressed circumstances. Watson was closely involved through his Presbytery’s Committee on Social Problems.

⁶¹⁴ BISHOP, D H., 1953, “Church and Society: A Study of the Social Work and Thought of James Begg, DD (1808-1883), A H Charteris, D.D., LL.D., (1835-1980) and David Watson D.D., (1859-1943)” Unpublished doctoral dissertation, the University of Edinburgh.

⁶¹⁵ See above p **TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION**

⁶¹⁶ *Report of the Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population of Scotland rural and urban, Minutes of Evidence*, Vol 1, p 893, 13 November 1913

⁶¹⁷ WATSON, *Chords of Memory* p 99

Never were funds better administered. There was no hint of patronage. It was a case of one member of a family helping another. Never, in my experience, were so many decent poor people (who would have died rather than have advertised their necessity) helped, without being pauperised, or dishonoured in their own eyes. It was an object lesson in Christian solidarity of priceless value today, when, unhappily, East End Churches have all the poor, and West End Churches have none. The responsibility of the latter for the poor is none the less, but all the greater on that account.⁶¹⁸

Watson was involved in the planning of the four Church of Scotland Congresses between 1899 and 1904, one of which, as has been noted, was devoted to the social responsibility of the Churches and addressed by Robert Flint. Watson gave evidence to a Royal Commission on Housing. He was to be vice-convenor and then convenor of the General Assembly's Committee on Social Work from 1904 to 1935. When he retired as Convenor of the Committee, the General Assembly recorded that "by his published works, his written articles, his pulpit addresses and his public speeches, Dr Watson has done more than any other man to impress upon the mind and heart of their people the social implications of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He is now recognised as speaking with the voice of authority on all aspects of the social question". Fittingly, the Moderator in 1935, who expressed the thanks of the General Assembly and who said that for thirty one years Watson had been "the life and soul" of all the aspirations of the Social Work Committee, was John Marshall Lang's son, Dr Marshall B Lang.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁸ WATSON, D., 1911, *Social Advance: Its Meaning, Message and Goal*, London p 303,304 (*Social Advance*)

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., pp 160, 161

If Watson's social commitment and concern were fired by his early experiences as a student and probationer, it was informed by the practicalities of his ministry in Glasgow's deprived east end. As well as the regular and systematic visitation of his congregation, he visited the parish of 9000 from door to door. He pioneered the holding of what today would be called Harvest Thanksgivings to put slum-dwellers in touch with nature. He started a Rambling Club "to take the young men away from their sordid surroundings". He established a clubroom in two single apartments, with a piano and a library and games such as draughts and dominoes. He opened a play group for children. He was a member of the Housing Committee of the Kyrle Society which managed the property purchased and renovated by the Glasgow Workmen's Dwelling Company.

Not surprisingly for someone who was an admirer of Robert Flint and who had close contact with both Donald Macleod and Marshall Lang David Watson's writings reveal both his preoccupation with the idea of the Kingdom of God and its influence on his ministry and social concern. His understanding of the Kingdom was clearly closely worked out theologically. Although it is not expressed in a systematic treatment of the theme, it is possible to draw together into a coherent picture the various elements in his thinking about the Kingdom, and its implications for the Church and consequences for society..

Watson starts from the conviction that the Church has not sufficiently preached about the Kingdom of God, and should don sackcloth in repentance.⁶²⁰ Since the Church is the agent of the Kingdom, responsible for its advance, the Church is also responsible

⁶²⁰ WATSON, *Social Advance*, p 298

for any failure to advance the cause of the Kingdom.⁶²¹ However Watson sees a sign of hope in that “the rediscovery of the Kingdom of God has been the greatest theological achievement of our day”.⁶²² The result of the Church’s failure to preach about the Kingdom is the Church’s encouragement of social stratification, deference to wealth and rank, and neglect of social justice.⁶²³ The result of the rediscovery of the doctrine of the Kingdom is that the era of the Social Question began and the Church was committed to social transformation. “Men are now practically unanimous” he writes, “in their conviction that social salvation, which is deliverance from all that hinders the perfection of society, lies in the practical application, and working out, of Christian principles”.⁶²⁴ Like Flint, Watson believes that the Kingdom of God will come on earth, and will involve a redeemed environment as well as redeemed individuals,⁶²⁵ and so the Kingdom is far wider than the Church, because it will include nations and Churches.⁶²⁶ Like Flint also he believes the Kingdom will arrive through a process of evolution under divine control.⁶²⁷

Watson’s reliance on Flint is most clearly seen in what he says about secular agencies contributing to the advance of the Kingdom of God. He points out that science, by leading to improvements in science and sanitation, by providing labour-saving devices and inventing forms of transport, and by enabling industry better to create

⁶²¹ Ibid., p 292

⁶²² WATSON, D., 1919, *The Social Expression of Christianity* London, p 27. Although the publication of this work, which contains lectures Watson delivered in Assembly’s College, Belfast, in 1919, falls outside the scope of this study, it is clear that it is based on earlier papers which Watson wrote. Watson’s fuller treatment of the Kingdom of God in this work is contained in much briefer references to it in his *Social Advance*, which contains his 1911 Gunning Lectures delivered in the University of Edinburgh and which is primarily concerned both with broader and more practical aspects of social theory

⁶²³ Ibid., p 17

⁶²⁴ WATSON, D., 1905, *Perfect Manhood*, London, p 229

⁶²⁵ WATSON, *Social Expression*, p 27

⁶²⁶ Ibid., p 25

⁶²⁷ Ibid., p 105

and society better to distribute wealth, “*provides the material framework for the Kingdom of God*”.⁶²⁸ Watson goes on to list contributions other than the overtly religious to the Kingdom of God in terms which are virtually a commentary on the passage quoted from Flint.⁶²⁹

The contribution of literature has been its powerful portrayal of the ideal social state and its incisive criticism of those evil conditions which hinder the ideal. The contribution of philanthropy has been its strenuous and magnificent achievement in the sphere of practical helpfulness and social amelioration.....The contribution of legislation lies in the many effective curbs it has placed upon human selfishness, cruelty and greed, and the many stimuli it has supplied to fair dealing and righteous conduct. The contribution of art has been its unwearied insistence on the eternal worth of beauty, and its everlasting appeal to the spirit of man. The contribution of commerce is the emphasis it lays on human solidarity, interdependence and mutual aid. The contribution of industry is its affirmation and demonstration of a truth which we forget at our peril, that upon work honestly and faithfully performed, and duty nobly done, must rest any true city or Kingdom of God.⁶³⁰

However all these secular pursuits will achieve more if dedicated to the Kingdom of God than they will achieve for the Kingdom if pursued for their own sake. “Art for the Kingdom of God’s sake will achieve greater things than art for art’s sake”.⁶³¹

⁶²⁸ WATSON, *Social Advance*, p 6,7

⁶²⁹ **TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION**

⁶³⁰ WATSON, *Social Advance*, p 9,10

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, p 291

The social nature of the Kingdom of God, according to Watson, stems from two of Jesus' institutions: the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Supper involved a divine society committed to love and service. "We have by no means exhausted the full social import of the sacramental meal instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ".⁶³² He maintains that just as the Lord's Supper makes use of material things for spiritual ends, so the social gospel of Christianity requires the Christian use of the material environment for people's spiritual development and well-being.⁶³³ The social implications of the Lord's Prayer are contained in its constant use of plural pronouns. The initial emphasis is on the Fatherhood of God "while the subsequent clauses emphasise social progress, social order, social duty and social worship".⁶³⁴

Watson also derives his understanding of the social nature of the Kingdom of God from the Apostles' Creed, where the Fatherhood of God, the social expression of the faith at Pentecost, and the Communion of Saints all point to it. The forgiveness of sins is the inspiration of the Church's ministry to "the social derelicts and human wreckage of our complex and strenuous civilisation",⁶³⁵ while the doctrines of the resurrection, judgment and immortality imply that the present life is a preparation, and therefore "everything which stunts character, handicaps life and hinders the free and harmonious development of personality should be removed".⁶³⁶

Watson, however, criticises the creeds for being too "metaphysical", with subtle theological definitions but no reference to the Kingdom of God, or social duty. He

⁶³² WATSON, *Social Expression*, p 78

⁶³³ Ibid., p 71

⁶³⁴ Ibid., p 79

⁶³⁵ Ibid., p 80

⁶³⁶ Ibid., p 81

explains that the creeds were written to address issues which were disputed, but the unchallenged doctrines such as the Kingdom of God and its social implications are implicit in all the articles of the creed.⁶³⁷

Interestingly, Watson only turns to the explicit teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God after he has found evidence for it in the Church's liturgy and creeds. This is because Watson believes that he no longer needs to argue for the place of the Kingdom of God in the Church's life and thinking. Nevertheless, he wants to avoid unnecessary tension between the two and so sees the broad outline of the Kingdom implicit in and consistent with what the high Churchmen of his day viewed as the Church's essential functions, the provision of worship and the promotion of creedal faith.. Watson also wants to derive from the teaching of Jesus the aspect of the Kingdom which most caused division in the Church of Watson's day: its social rather than its individual character.

In 1905, when Watson published *Perfect Manhood*, he was of the view that the Kingdom of God would be achieved through the efforts of individual Christians. "The goal or objective of all social effort," he wrote, "is the realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth, but it is becoming increasingly clear that our way to the Kingdom is through the individual". Echoing exactly the words of Robert Flint, he added, "Socialism has done one excellent service: it has taught us the eternal value of individualism".⁶³⁸ However Watson was later to modify his view of the individualist route to the Kingdom of God.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., p 83

⁶³⁸ WATSON, *Perfect Manhood*, Preface

Michael McCabe has argued that “progressives like Watson were not critical of individualism as such, but they were concerned that over-emphasising it in politics had resulted in discrimination in favour of the rich and well-off to the detriment of the welfare of the poor and working classes”.⁶³⁹ He uses the passage quoted above, in which Watson says the way to the Kingdom *is through the individual* [his emphasis] as evidence of Watson’s belief in the conversion of individuals as a prerequisite of the Kingdom’s advance. However the quotation comes from Watson’s 1905 *Perfect Manhood* and Watson very soon revised his view. He compared Jesus’ teaching to an ellipse with two foci, (which he borrowed from Ritschl) one focus was the individual soul and the other was the Kingdom of God. “The first of these has had full justice done to it; the second has never had”.⁶⁴⁰ So Watson described the individualist route to the Kingdom of God as a “spent force”.⁶⁴¹ “It was the exclusive emphasis laid upon individual redemption, and the neglect or misapprehension of the Kingdom which wrought the mischief”.⁶⁴² And he stresses that Jesus “enunciated certain great fundamental principles which were bound eventually to undermine every social wrong and transform society”.⁶⁴³ social righteousness, mercy, brotherly love and sacrifice and service.

Watson describes the Kingdom of God as “spiritual and universal”,⁶⁴⁴ and as involving the regeneration of the earth. However, when he contrasts the spirituality and the materialism of the Kingdom, he is not contrasting pietism with social action. The “material Kingdom” which Watson says Jesus rejected is not therefore to be

⁶³⁹ MCCABE, M., “Luther’s Blunder: David Watson and Social Christianity in Early Twentieth Century Scotland” in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, XXX, 200, p 197

⁶⁴⁰ WATSON, *Social Expression*, p 86

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p 104

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, p107

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, p 108

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p 90

thought of as indifferent to the conditions of this world, but rather a Kingdom in which Jesus refused “to seize the throne and crown himself King”.⁶⁴⁵ And when Jesus said that his Kingdom was “not of this world”, he did not mean that his Kingdom had no implications for society, but that it came from the divine order. “It was of heavenly origin, not earthly. But its sphere was and is emphatically this world, and the realisation of this truth would bring a new redemptive force into the social order”.⁶⁴⁶

As we will see, there was disagreement within the Churches at the time not only about the final nature of the Kingdom of God but also about the means by which it was to be achieved. Watson believed that it “will not come through any merely economic change, urgent as that may be, but through the return of the nation to the living God”. There were those who insisted that the only way the nation would return to God and so approach God’s Kingdom was through the efforts of Christian individuals, inspired in their witness by the preaching of the Christian Church. Watson takes such views one stage further and he envisages the Kingdom of God being reached by more than individuals’ actions. He recognises a role for the Church as an institution in the advancement of the Kingdom. As well as fulfilling their Christian witness, individual Christians mould and form Christian opinion, and in turn Christian opinion transforms society. “That is how the Kingdom will come”.⁶⁴⁷ However, in addition to the transforming of society through influence, Watson insists that Christian effort and energy have to be expended in the cause of the Kingdom. This may take the form of philanthropy, or social improvement, or a moral crusade or

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., p 94

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., p 95

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., p 30

direct social reform.⁶⁴⁸ As a matter of priority, however, Watson calls for “the best men, not only progressive but distinctly Christian” to become involved with the care of the poor, the management of education and the control of municipal affairs.⁶⁴⁹ He would like to see a sense of stewardship which recognised that “money and gifts and influence and life itself are a solemn trust from God the Giver of all, to be administered in the interests of his Kingdom,” as well as a greater concern for moral evils and a keener interest in social problems.⁶⁵⁰

Watson understands that Christian witness and opinion are forged within the institutional Church. When he turns to the role of the Church in the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom, Watson gives it a central place: it is the divine instrument of human redemption,⁶⁵¹ and its main business is through its worship to advance the Kingdom of God,⁶⁵² which should be “worked for as well as prayed for”. Moving to the more specific role which he sees for the Church in the advancement of the Kingdom of God, Watson outlines a role for the Church as custodian of social welfare. He says, with regard to the housing question in which he was so interested, that “it is the duty of the city to see that the citizens are properly housed, and it is the duty of the Church to see that it is done”.⁶⁵³ However Watson expresses the common view of the time that the Church must not commit itself to any particular economic theory or political solution.

It is the duty of the Church to lay down broad principles of
righteousness – individual, civic, social and national – to affirm

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., p 67

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., p 69

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., p 70

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., p 23

⁶⁵² Ibid., p 24

⁶⁵³ Ibid., p 50

the solidarity of mankind, and that it is not well with the whole so long as any section of the community is weak, socially insufficient, underpaid, ill-housed, and deprived of the opportunity of living as full, healthy and happy life.⁶⁵⁴

And, in rhetorical mode, Watson insists that the Church's duty to the incoming Kingdom is to articulate "that divine discontent with the existing order which is the guarantee and the impelling motive of all true reform".⁶⁵⁵

David Watson's coherent connection of social theology to pastoral practice makes him a very important figure in the development of the Church of Scotland's engagement with social issues. Despite McCabe's insistence on Watson's evangelical individualism, Watson's social theology is open to the criticism that he is places insufficient emphasis on individual sinfulness. He writes, for example

We have not sufficiently realised how largely moral evils spring from unchristian social conditions. We have too often been content to say that they spring from a depraved heart, without inquiring too minutely into the cause of human depravity. It might surprise some to learn that the devil or original sin had less to do with it than the slum and the public house.⁶⁵⁶

"Less to do with it", perhaps. In wanting to provide a counterbalance to the tendency to blame poverty on individual fecklessness and irresponsibility which was a view given considerable expression in evidence to the Housing Commission set up by the Church of Scotland Presbytery of Glasgow, it is understandable that Watson is

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., p 55

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., p 71

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., p 41

tempted to underplay the role of human sin. When he gave evidence to the Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, Watson was closely questioned about his view that social conditions effectively outweighed all other factors in their effect on the individual character. When asked if he agreed that “no matter what you do by personal influence, by every improvement in life that you can bring to bear, you are still faced with (the results of overcrowding) on the individual character?” Watson replied “There is no doubt about that”. And when he was asked to say that family improvements would achieve nothing without better housing, and whether he would support that from his own experience, Watson said simply “Yes”.⁶⁵⁷ Watson is therefore led to an optimism about improving society which could be regarded as unrealistic. Again, in evidence to the Royal Commission, he said that if there were better housing for the poor, supervised by caretakers, “you would have very few of these destructive tenants. You would again educate, you would pull up these social laggards, that class is the problem with us. The educative process would by and by result in eliminating or abolishing the class altogether”.⁶⁵⁸ Those destructive tenants who did not respond, Watson said, he would send to a labour colony for life. Where parents are constantly drunken or vicious, children should be removed from their care and reared by the state.⁶⁵⁹ Watson’s optimism about the effect of slum clearance was, however, tempered by a degree of realism. “I should like to sound a note of warning with regard to the future” he wrote in 1901. “While improving insanitary areas the authorities should keep a sharp look-out, and make sure that similar areas

⁶⁵⁷ *Report of the Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population of Scotland rural and urban, Minutes of Evidence*, Vol 1, p 899, 13 November 1913

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p 900

⁶⁵⁹ WATSON, D., 1901, *Child Life in Cities*, Glasgow, p 6

are not being allowed to spring up elsewhere, or the whole weary process of pulling down and clearing out will have to be gone over again”.⁶⁶⁰

Watson’s understanding of the Kingdom of God as essentially pervasive means he has to rely on a number of assumptions which were to prove over-optimistic. He has to assume that the Kingdom’s transforming power will bring about improved social conditions which, in turn, he assumes will produce regenerated lives. To be fair to him, at the time he wrote there had not yet been a sufficient amount of rehousing and improved housing for the discovery to have been made that these social improvement did not always result in the sort of reformed society that Watson envisaged.

However, even by the political circumstances of Watson’s day, one aspect of his attitude to the Church’s involvement in the political arena is unrealistic. He believed that “if great questions involving grave moral and social issues were disentangled from party, and placed separately before the country, say by referendum, the Church might then intervene and throw the whole weight of her influence openly on the side of righteousness”. He does not, however, make clear how moral and social issues could be separated from party politics if, as was so often the case, party divisions often reflected opposing attitudes on moral and social issues. G R Searle, surveying what he calls “the years of crisis” between 1908 and 1914, regards the various movements which put pressure on the Liberal Government – Irish Republicans and Irish Loyalists, syndicalists and suffragettes – as exhibiting “a strain of moral absolutism”.⁶⁶¹ Far from it being possible to remove moral issues from the world of party politics, moral issues were invading that world. Nor does Watson explain how

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶⁶¹ SEARLE, G.R., 2004, *A New England?* Oxford, p 471

the Church could apply the weight of her influence when the Church itself was divided on moral issues.

William M Clow

William Clow was the first minister of Stevenson Memorial Church in the west end of Glasgow. Though born in Glasgow he received his schooling in New Zealand and the United States and then graduated in arts and divinity at Glasgow University. He was minister in Lanarkshire, Aberdeen and Edinburgh before being inducted to Stevenson Memorial in 1902. In 1911 he was appointed to the Chair of Practical Training and Christian Ethics at Trinity College in Glasgow, of which he became Principal in 1922. Clow was someone of impeccable evangelical credentials, and close to a number of the United Free Church leaders. For example, Dr George Reith of the College Church, whose members had contributed considerably to the building of Stevenson Memorial, was instrumental in bringing Clow from Edinburgh.

Clow had no sympathy with the view that the Church had a duty to be socially involved. He regarded the conferences on social issues which both the United Free Church and the Church of Scotland ran in the early years of the twentieth century as of no value. "Nothing comes out of the papers which are read and the keen criticisms which follow".⁶⁶² Clow said ministers must avoid using the pulpit to discuss public social issues.⁶⁶³ He refused to allow any prophetic role to the preacher, insisting that if a minister wishes to follow the example of Isaiah, Amos or Hosea, he must "resign his charge and devote himself to what he is entitled to say as a high and honourable

⁶⁶² CLOW, W.M., 1913, *Christ and the Social Order*, London, p 25

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, p 270

and Christian service”.⁶⁶⁴ The suggestion made in the United Free Church Assembly that divinity students be introduced to the disciplines of sociology and social relations is summarily dismissed as “nonsense”.⁶⁶⁵

Because the courts of the Church, Presbyteries and the General Assembly, according to Clow, have a responsibility for the oversight of the Christian life of the members of the Church, they may have a responsibility to explore public issues. But the discussion of political questions must be avoided because they are divisive and there are other forums where such discussions can more appropriately take place. However,

the Church court has a duty of pronouncing upon the ethical import of all proposed legislation, of all civic regulations, and of the administration of the law of the land. It should insist that economics must be ethical. It should insist that laws shall not imperil the liberty of conscience, or the freedom of religion. It should insist that no legislation shall encourage any laxity, or self-indulgence, or discourage the finer instincts of the people, where there are laws of commerce which break Christ’s commandments. Where there are customs which injure the young, oppress the feeble, wrong the poor, corrupt either the minds or the bodies of those who toil, where there are tyrannies of rich over poor, or of poor over rich, where there is any invasion or infringement of ethical righteousness by the laws of the land, or in their administration, there the voice of the Church, by its

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., p 273

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., p 264

courts, should never fail to be heard..⁶⁶⁶

That passage illustrates perfectly the confusion in Clow's whole social theology. The passionate rhetoric demanding that the voice of the courts of the Church be heard where there is social injustice is as impressive as that of any who would have regarded themselves as theological critics of Clow. However, Clow immediately goes on to indicate that the right of the Church courts to speak on political and social issues is qualified. "But this voice must speak only within the sphere of ethics, and any heady denunciation of riches as riches, employers as employers, or of workmen as workmen, *is an offence against society and against the command of Christ*".[My emphasis]⁶⁶⁷

Clow also opposed relatively moderate areas of social improvement or reform. He is unsympathetic to appeals for shorter working hours. "This cry for leisure is overdone. It is in some cases only the cry of laziness disguising itself. Men used to speak of the dignity of labour. They now covet the dignity of idleness".⁶⁶⁸ He dismissed the products of the 1906 Liberal government, like the Old Age Pensions Act and the Insurance and Employment Act as "enforced by organised labour endeavouring to adjust our present industrial order".⁶⁶⁹ For Clow, few who joined Co-operative Societies were inspired by the movement's ideals.⁶⁷⁰

Clow published *Christ in the Social Order* in 1913 but as will be clear when the attitude of the United Free Church's General Assembly to the Kingdom of God is

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., p 269

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., p 269

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., p 177

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., p 184

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., p 185

traced below it reflects views he had held for some considerable time. He says that he writes against a background of social unrest, to which the relationships of wealth to poverty, capital to labour and women to work all contribute,⁶⁷¹ and the capacity of these relationships to contribute to social unrest has been accentuated by the prevalence of pity, and the extension of the franchise. Pity expresses itself in compassion for the poor. “I do not say that compassion is to be condemned. But it should be a commonplace that those who act only from emotion often fail in wisdom. As often they disregard the great principles of justice and helpfulness. They merely please themselves”.⁶⁷² The extension of the franchise means that “the discontented have votes”. And political parties “are chary of talking blunt wisdom to the masses possessed of an enormous aggregate vote”.⁶⁷³ Only “armchair enthusiasts” really believed in profit-sharing as a means of bringing capital and labour together..⁶⁷⁴

Clow approaches social issues from an entirely different standpoint and with a totally different set of presuppositions than did David Watson. Their understanding of the Kingdom of God and the Church’s part in it have little in common, except the belief that the Church is not to be identified with the Kingdom, and that the Church shares with other agencies the task of working towards the Kingdom of God. In a book of sermons he produced just as he was preparing to leave Stevenson Memorial Church for Trinity College, Clow repeats the view which Flint expresses in the *Kingdom of Christ upon Earth* that “whenever men regard the Church and the Kingdom as one, they lead themselves and others astray”, but Clow means something very different by this from Flint. Other organisations such as the family and the city, the university

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., pp 15-19

⁶⁷² Ibid., p 21

⁶⁷³ Ibid.,

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid p 187

and the state can and should contribute to the coming of the Kingdom.⁶⁷⁵ However Clow makes it clear that within these organisations, only individuals who have faith and become obedient to God are capable of contributing towards the Kingdom.⁶⁷⁶ This does seem to raise the question of whether it is meaningful for Clow to say that the Church and the Kingdom are not identical, if, in fact he allows only those in other organisations and institutions who are Christians to contribute towards the Kingdom. It is certainly a very different view of the role organisations other than the Church can play in working for the Kingdom of God from the view Flint held. Flint believed a contribution could be made by secular agencies towards the Kingdom of God without the agencies being staffed by Christians.

Clow admits that there are difficulties in uncovering Jesus' social ideals. Jesus was not a systematic thinker, nor aware of modern conditions, nor a social reformer. However he is sure that that Jesus taught that the basis of the Kingdom of God was "an inviolable individualism".⁶⁷⁷ Clow deduced that the Hebrew social ideal was "that life can be lived rightly only on the basis of an inviolable individualism. That basis Christ accepted and enforced. Nothing is more certain than his jealous regard for and impassioned interest in the individual".⁶⁷⁸ Clow believes that exegetically and historically the Kingdom of God can only be realised through individual hearts and lives.

Some are eager to try any method which promises to remedy
some of the glaring wrongs of the time. Others are angry with

⁶⁷⁵ CLOW, W., 1911, *The Secret of the Lord*, London, p 60

⁶⁷⁶ CLOW, *Christ and the Social Order*, p 84

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., p 75

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., p 77

the rich and their ways. Others are envious of their soft lives
and dainty luxuries. Others are filled with a keen pity for the poor
and their dark and narrow homes. Others are moved by a desire
to advance Christ's Kingdom by amending that social order which
so grievously hinders it.....They are like people who suffer from an
obscure disease, and run off to any fair-spoken vendor, who
proclaims his drug as a peculiar remedy.⁶⁷⁹

So Clow concludes that it is the Christian citizen's duty as "a citizen, and a resident in
a parish or district, and a voter, unsparingly (to) devote himself to realising the
Kingdom of God".⁶⁸⁰

Clow insists that Jesus envisaged a spiritualised Kingdom of God. It does Jesus a
grave injustice to claim that Jesus "posed as a social reformer, and ignore the mass
and weight of his teaching which gives that statement the clearest denial."⁶⁸¹ What
Jesus did was to plant the seed within men's hearts of a new social order.⁶⁸²
However Clow is quite clear about what did not interest Jesus concerning the new
social order he envisaged. Jesus was not interested in the distribution of wealth.⁶⁸³
He never confused justice with equality.⁶⁸⁴ Neither poverty nor riches played a large
part in his teaching.⁶⁸⁵ He dismissed earthly goals as things the Gentiles seek, and
no part of the Kingdom of God.⁶⁸⁶ He refused to deal with the issue of capital and

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., p 91

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., p 267

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., p 73

⁶⁸² Ibid., p 81

⁶⁸³ Ibid., p 86

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., p 78

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., p 96

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., p 63

labour in any form in which it was presented to him.⁶⁸⁷ He condemned covetousness in rich and poor, but did not condemn wealth.⁶⁸⁸ Dealing with the tendency of Luke's Gospel to record Jesus passing severe judgments on the rich and expressing a favourable attitude to the poor⁶⁸⁹ Clow prefers Matthew's spiritualising of the saying, believing that Luke misinterpreted Jesus by thinking he referred to material poverty whereas Matthew correctly realised that Jesus meant poverty of spirit.⁶⁹⁰ On the other hand, according to Clow, "Jesus regarded riches, when honestly and honourably gained, as an *achievement*".⁶⁹¹ He would not approve of an attack on wealth.

That is neither just ethics nor wise economics. He would not sanction a law which would rob the individual of his liberty, even although it be a liberty to suffer, unless and until that liberty becomes a menace to the well-being of others. He would not distribute, as he did not distribute, frequent, or easy, or indiscriminate charity. He would endeavour to bring both the richer and the poorer, the employer and the employee into a new relationship to God and to each otherHe would say both to capital and to labour, to rich and to poor, to master and to servant, to the man of many talents and the man of few, as to the man and the woman – 'What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.'⁶⁹²

Jesus, Clow says, would not abolish capitalism because there is no reason to imagine that Jesus believed in economic equality⁶⁹³ and because Jesus' parables and dealings

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., p 145

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., p 104

⁶⁸⁹ St Luke Chapter 6 verses 20-26

⁶⁹⁰ CLOW, *Christ and the Social Order*, p 101

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., p 111

⁶⁹² Ibid., p 142,143

with people of wealth show that he realised that the capitalist is essential.⁶⁹⁴ Clow derives from the parables of the pounds and the talents, of the labourers in the vineyard and the unmerciful servant respectively his belief that Jesus laid obligations on the capitalist: honest and honourable service, generous oversight of labour and self-sacrifice on the occasion of need.⁶⁹⁵

Because of what he understands to be the teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God's relationship to social problems and issues, Clow will not allow the Gospel to be used in the cause of social improvement. The argument that environmental conditions influence spiritual commitment is not one that Clow appears to accept. "Every man who knows the poor can recount numberless cases of homes, as holy as the home of Nazareth, maintained on less than £1 a week".⁶⁹⁶ The view that very low income provides a disincentive to spiritual growth and development was one which, as has been already noted, was regularly used as an argument for the Church's involvement in the improvement of social conditions.⁶⁹⁷ Clow was someone who was inclined to state his case in terms of debating points, and this may be one. Although he dismisses those who think that faith cannot thrive in poor conditions on the basis that everyone knows holy homes surviving on less than £1 a week, he nevertheless states categorically that "the man who has not a living wage is prevented from entering Christ's Kingdom, or attaining that character which Christ declares to be the supreme achievement in life. If a man has not a decent living wage, he is deprived of the conditions of a healthful and moral life".⁶⁹⁸ However, Clow immediately goes on to

⁶⁹³ Ibid., p 149

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., p 153

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., pp 154-159

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., p 63

⁶⁹⁷ See above. P xxx **(TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION)**

⁶⁹⁸ CLOW, *Christ in the Social Order*, p 170

state that in his view a “living wage” is not the same as the minimum wage being demanded by many labour politicians and trade unionists.⁶⁹⁹ Despite this tacit acknowledgement of the effect of social conditions on spiritual attitudes, Clow’s opposition to the Kingdom of God being achieved through a social gospel is absolute because the only environment which is detrimental to faith and to purity is the environment of moral evil, not of industrial hardship”.⁷⁰⁰

When, in the context of his individualist social theology, Clow says that the role and function of the Church is to be “the special agency designed to bring in the Kingdom of God”⁷⁰¹ it is not surprising that the role he sees for the Church is “to win men to Christ, to bring them into touch with God, to refine and perfect their character so as to make them citizens of the Kingdom”.⁷⁰² Thus the Church’s priority is “not to make laws, not to lobby public questions, not to pronounce on the matter of hours and wages, not to play policemen in the streets, but to make men of faith”.⁷⁰³ Continuing his theme of the individual’s responsibility for advancing the Kingdom, Clow says that the second duty of the Church “is to expound the principles taught by Christ and to apply these principles to the lives of men”.

Were every Christian man living in the world with eyes open
both to good and evil, his conscience quickened to see the path
of his own conscience, and his will strengthened to walk in it,
the strife between capital and labour would not last for a week, and
the revolt of woman, seeking a worldly sphere and a selfish

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., p 171

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., p 62

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., p 258

⁷⁰² Ibid., p 259

⁷⁰³ Ibid., p 260,261

economic independence, would die within every Christ-like heart.⁷⁰⁴

Clow's social theology is outlined in a book he published in 1913, *Christ and the Social Order*. The date is significant. In the years leading up to the outbreak of the first world war, Britain faced several crises. Some of them were parliamentary, arising first from the House of Lords' rejection of Lloyd George's "People's Budget" of 1909 and then from the conflict between Lords and Commons culminating in the Parliament Act of 1911. Parliamentary conflicts sometimes matter less to the public than those involved in them imagine, but the two elections of 1910, brought about by the constitutional crisis contributed to a sense of instability in the country. The death of the popular Edward VII and the accession of George V, who was perceived to be much more distant, added a further element of uncertainty.

In addition to the destabilising effect of the constitutional crisis there was continuing uncertainty over the future of Ireland as the government introduced a third Home Rule Bill. There was always concern about the future of the north of the island in the west of Scotland, but the Irish question posed a wider question for Scotland if, as was claimed, sixty two of the seventy two MPs for Scottish constituencies supported Home Rule for Scotland.

From 1905, syndicalists began to urge that Trade Unions should work towards taking power at local and national levels through federations of unions at a local level becoming the local authority for the area, and a national congress of all unions becoming the government. The Trade Unions control of different industries would

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., pp 261, 262

come about, so the syndicalists believed, through a series of strikes, culminating in a General Strike. Those who took the syndicalist threat seriously found a good deal of evidence to justify their fears in strikes in all the major industries after 1910, and 1913, the year Clow published *Christ in the Social Order*, according to G.R. Searle, there was a record number of 1497 strikes and unemployment rose to 11.3%⁷⁰⁵ Later the same year the Riot Act had to be read in Liverpool and the army was deployed in Liverpool and South Wales. Clow was writing, therefore, at a time when, in Searle's judgment, "the country appeared to be on the verge of civil war".⁷⁰⁶

In addition to the widespread industrial unrest, there the "Women's Revolt" became increasingly militant after 1910, the year in which Emily Dickinson was arrested attempting to set light to a pillar box in Parliament Street in London with paraffin. The following year stones were thrown at the Prime Minister's windows. In 1913, suffragettes damaged the orchid house in Kew, set fire to a railway carriage and bombed Lloyd George's home. And in that same year Emily Dickinson threw herself under the King's horse at the Derby. Clow was writing at a time of suffragette violence which had become very serious.

Clow was a conservative, and his congregation in Glasgow's west end was a comfortable middle-class one, drawn from the terraced houses which had been built to the north of Great Western Road, and the tile-lined red-sandstone apartment blocks of north Kelvinside. It is not difficult to imagine the anxious response to the growing series of crises which were evidence of the sinful world's need of redemption which was so often the theme of Clow's sermons.

⁷⁰⁵ Searle, G.R., 2004, *A New England?* Oxford, p 442

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., p 444

If David Watson is open to the criticism that his social theology is over-optimistic, William Clow's is even more so. Convinced that historically all social improvements have followed religious revivals, he virtually makes religious revival a condition of social progress. "In these revivals, the Church concentrated her energies upon her own supreme business. She brought men to Christ, and she laid upon them the sacred duty of the Christ-like character. When that had been done the generation, so renewed in spirit, rose up with a new moral passion, to reform, in the social, industrial, economic and political spheres the wrongs then seen and hated".⁷⁰⁷ Despite his citing of Slave Emancipation or Factory Acts as evidence of the individual Christian's ability to bring about social change, Clow seems to have little sense of contemporary structural and institutional vested interest in maintaining conditions of poverty which, Clow maintains is largely due to three individual causes: drink, improvidence and sloth. Nor does he recognise the complicity of members of the Church, through property ownership, in poor housing conditions.

As has been noted, Clow allows that Church courts have the right to pronounce on the ethical implications of political actions. However he would forbid ministers from publicly discussing social or political issues. It seems inconsistent to deny to ministers the right to speak on social problems, while expecting them to remain silent in the Church courts, where they had the right to speak. Even if Clow is distinguishing between what he regards as permissible at a Presbytery meeting and what he would allow in a pulpit, the public would not be sufficiently perceptive to recognise the significance of the different contexts. It is also difficult to understand

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., p 265

how the ethical implications of social issues and legislation can be separated from their political context in such a way as to allow the Church to comment on the ethics but not the politics.

Clow insists that only the contributions of committed Christians in the secular world can be regarded as contributing to the advance of the Kingdom of God, which would seem to suggest that Clow regards the Kingdom of God as in some way restricted entirely to motive and not to result. Clow says that institutions other than the Church, such as the city, the university and the state, can and should contribute to the coming of the Kingdom,” but if only the municipal, educational and legislative achievements of committed Christians can make a contribution to the \Kingdom, , it is not clear what status he would give to the achievements of which would be regarded as contributing towards the Kingdom but have been achieved without a Christian commitment and whether what would be contributions to the advancement of the Kingdom of God if brought about by Christians cannot be considered as contributions towards the Kingdom if the result of the actions of those who do not subscribe to the faith.

A Scott Matheson

Scott Matheson was one of the ministers most sympathetic to socialism. His book *The Gospel and Modern Substitutes*⁷⁰⁸ originated in a series of lectures he gave on Sunday evenings in September and October 1888 in Dumbarton, where he was minister of Dumbarton High Street United Presbyterian Church. They were published the following year in the magazine *The Christian Socialist*.⁷⁰⁹ Matheson, who joined

⁷⁰⁸ MATHESON, A.S., 1890, *The Gospel and Modern Substitutes*, Edinburgh
⁷⁰⁹ The Christian Socialist, November 1889, p 170

the United Free Church in 1900 along with his congregation published two more substantial works, *The Church and Social Problems*⁷¹⁰ and *The City of Man*.⁷¹¹ *The City of Man* is a review of various social experiments, such as the Garden City, and an argument for a considerable extension of municipalisation into such areas as school meals⁷¹² and milk shops in order to guarantee the quality of milk for children,⁷¹³ inadequate parenting,⁷¹⁴ the acquisition and development of land for housing,⁷¹⁵ and improved sanitation.⁷¹⁶ Matheson is a great admirer of the municipalisation which has taken place in Glasgow where he was a UP minister before moving to Dumbarton. “The Corporation of Glasgow” he says, “is now the Mecca of the municipal reformer”.⁷¹⁷ Matheson’s support for municipalisation is expressed against the background of his conviction that Christianity offers “an ideal civic creed” which fashions the ideal citizen⁷¹⁸ because Christ’s preaching of the Kingdom of God was intended to have political implications.

The New Testament reveals the Kingdom of God as the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and the Sermon on the Mount is the manifesto of its Citizen-King. For every Christian the question comes to the front: ‘Is the Sermon on the Mount a fantastic theory or a working programme of life?’ To academic minds it seems a beautiful ideal hovering over our earth, of a kind with Plato’s Republic, never realised and perhaps not meant to be realised.... Christ meant his laws and relations of the Kingdom to be a guide for conduct, and he

⁷¹⁰ MATHESON, A.S., 1893, *The Church and Social Problems*, Edinburgh

⁷¹¹ MATHESON, A.S., 1910, *The City of Man*, London

⁷¹² Ibid., p 72

⁷¹³ Ibid., p 73

⁷¹⁴ Ibid., p 78-79

⁷¹⁵ Ibid., p 177

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., p 184

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., p 199

⁷¹⁸ Ibid., p 15

is no Christian who does not strive for their embodiment in every social sphere.⁷¹⁹

More than Watson or Clow, Matheson senses a need to assert the earthly nature of the Kingdom of God. He says that when Jesus said that his Kingdom was not of this world, he meant that the Kingdom's authority and principles did not derive from this world's understanding of power or on any human wisdom. He certainly did not mean that the Kingdom of God should not be involved in every aspect of life on earth. "The ideal ever shining before us is a vision of the city of God – not something to be taken up into the far-off blue, but to be now and here as soon as possible on this solid earth".⁷²⁰ The eschatological emphasis which has been thought in the past to be a determining principle of the Kingdom of God requires now to be modified so that the emphasis is laid on justice, love and brotherhood here on earth. "The Kingdom of God is the leaven which Christ says shall yet penetrate and transform society in every possible sphere of life".⁷²¹

Matheson therefore applauds the theological shift from doctrinal to ethical issues. The chief strength of Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God is its ethical content, but there has been a tendency in Britain to regard ethics as no more significant than pagan morality. The Kingdom of God envisages progress not as "individualistic but socialistic" and therefore the ethics of the Kingdom have to do with social cohesion rather than personal morality, according to Matheson.⁷²² This is summed up in the Golden Rule of doing to others what we would have them do to us, and so, crucially

⁷¹⁹ Ibid., p 13

⁷²⁰ Ibid., p 16

⁷²¹ MATHESON, *The Church and Social Problems*, p- 18

⁷²² Ibid., p 19

for Matheson, individualism becomes the consequence of the Kingdom's ethical stress on social justice, not the inspiration for it. Thus he combines the individualism that is to be found in the Gospel and therefore in the Kingdom of God with the social involvement which Matheson wants to stress, and to which individuals, affirmed within the community are further to promote "Justice includes the free play of individual character, the equal right of each to realise his nature and be what God meant him to be; it also includes that each man counts one, and nobody more than one; while it rises out of individualism into the great thought of the community and sets forth fellowship, brotherhood and co-operation."⁷²³

While Clow and to some extent Watson envisage the primacy of individual salvation which then results in an individual's commitment to social justice and the promotion of social cohesion, Matheson sees individual salvation as well as individual potential arising out of the Kingdom of God. The Church must show "that 'the Gospel of the Kingdom of God' *contains not only the promise of individual salvation* [my emphasis] but likewise the clue to all social and economic difficulties". So Matheson concludes that far from being a distraction from the real evangelical purpose of the Church, an involvement with social problems gives the Church an opportunity to commend the Gospel as being the power of God to social and personal salvation.⁷²⁴

The Church's involvement with social problems, arising from the imperative of the Kingdom of God is not, as critics have said, the substitution of material concerns for the true spiritual Gospel. According to Matheson, the reverse is the case. A concern for social problems is an antidote to the commercialism and materialism of the day.⁷²⁵

So the Church's duty is to pursue social and ethical developments with vigour, to

⁷²³ Ibid., p 18

⁷²⁴ Ibid., p 20

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

learn to support the best interests of humanity as they are taught through the social sciences, to preach the social gospel and to share with people the conviction “that the Gospel.....is something far broader, more human and more divine than its best exponents have yet revealed”.⁷²⁶ However Matheson believes that the Church has not yet grasped principles of social justice which, he says, are “wrapped up” in the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and so the Church has not yet understood the principles of a potentially reconstructed society which the Church has to teach.⁷²⁷

Because there is a relationship between the duties of the individual as citizen and the Christian’s commitment to the Kingdom of God Church and State have mutual duties. The Church has a duty to train its members and the State to train its citizens to do justice to the principles which they share and on which a stable and righteous society can be established. Therefore the whole machinery of the State should be devoted to supporting the Church’s manifesto for the Kingdom of God, while the Church should set no limits to its influence.

No limit should be set to the sphere of her action; no department of life should be passed by. Industry, home life, civic statesmanship, politics, the world of science and art, of literature and recreation – her gracious concept of the Kingdom of God should permeate and purify all. If the Church set herself to this task, backed by no authority but divine truth and constrained by no motive but divine love, her citizens could permanently lift the whole of public life from the quagmire of selfishness, secularity and animalism in which it is stuck, could make national religion a paramount fact, and change a nation of traders

⁷²⁶ Ibid., p 19

⁷²⁷ Ibid p 10

and seamen into a commonwealth of patriotic and Christian citizens.⁷²⁸

This vision of a return to a form of Godly Commonwealth is a firm feature of Matheson's social theology. It stems from his conviction that Church and State, Christian congregation and civic municipality are two sides of one reality which is ultimately theological; that the religious and secular world owe to each other duties of mutual obligation because, in the final analysis, their aims are the same. So Christ's social ethic and the ideal civic creed are identical.

Because Matheson is such an admirer of municipal development and civic involvement, he embraces totally the Flintian doctrine that the Church must welcome and promote all secular movements and organisations that advance the Kingdom.

It will be the duty of the Church to welcome such democratic institutions as village, municipal and county councils, and use them as fit organs for realising Christian ideals, and carrying out such operations as the housing of the poor and temperance reform. Such powers are likely to be given to these councils, and when they come, the Church should have its members taught in the obligations of Christian citizenship, and ready to play a yeoman's part in the cause of social progress. From the pulpit men should be urged to volunteer for Christ's service in municipalities and village councils just as they are urged to come out for service in the Sunday School and Home Mission work.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁸ MATHESON, *City of Man*, pp 53,54

⁷²⁹ MATHESON, *The Church and Social Problems*, p 11

Two practical applications of Matheson's understanding of the Kingdom of God should be noted. First, the Kingdom belongs to both men and women, who, he says, are equal and this equality "has been universally violated, almost entirely ignored".⁷³⁰ There must be equality of opportunity, especially in education "Women should not be debarred from any educational advantage, from any sort of culture that if fitted to elicit, balance and complete their gifts of mind and heart".⁷³¹ In particular, Matheson believes women have a particular place in the medical profession.⁷³² However "woman's Kingdom is the home; her highest office is that of wifehood and motherhood".⁷³³ Second, Matheson believes that it has been the fault of English economists to concentrate on wealth creation rather than wealth distribution⁷³⁴ and that how best to redistribute wealth – which is the way to deal with poverty⁷³⁵ - is the primary task of the present generation of economists.⁷³⁶

As we have noted, Scott Matheson sees the Kingdom's stress on individualism and the pursuit of the individual's potential as a consequence of the Kingdom's principles of social justice. What he says about both the role of women and the redistribution of wealth illustrates the dynamic he envisages. The principle of social justice is expressed through wealth distribution because it makes it more likely that individuals will achieve their potential. "Why are 200,000 producers of wealth paid so small a proportion of the wealth they produce," he asks, "that they are obliged to rent one-room houses and live in surroundings that prevent decency, morality and health; that cause 82% of their children to die before they are five years old; and that abridge their

⁷³⁰ Ibid., p 265

⁷³¹ Ibid., p 270

⁷³² Ibid., p 282

⁷³³ Ibid., p 275

⁷³⁴ Ibid., p 49

⁷³⁵ Ibid., p 161

⁷³⁶ Ibid., p 33

lives to an average of twenty five years, as compared with an average of fifty years for the upper classes?”⁷³⁷ And the principle of equality of opportunity for women and men is a principle of the Kingdom of God precisely because it enables women to cultivate their potential and through achieving it make their own contribution to the commonweal.⁷³⁸

Matheson’s synthesis of the role of the individual and of society in social progress is an impressive one, and his knowledge of contemporary social experiments is wide. In two respects, however, he succumbs to a certain romanticism. He is a passionate supporter, for example, of the Garden City, which he would like to make “a stepping stone to some higher and better form of industrial life”.⁷³⁹ He is lyrical about the garden suburb, “a “garlanded chain round the metropolis like Hampstead Heath and others made possible (which) enables people to live ten or twenty miles amid the beauties of the country and to come backward and forward to town for business”. It is something of an exaggeration to draw a comparison between the Garden City or suburb and the new Jerusalem of the Book of Revelation, with a pure river, and trees on either side of the street. “Sceptic after sceptic” Matheson says, “has sneered at the heavenly Jerusalem as a piece of vulgar jewellery – a caricature which betrays a lamentable absence of the power of vision”.⁷⁴⁰

Matheson is similarly romantic about the “model municipality” of Glasgow, and in particular the “deepening and purifying of the Clyde” which made shipbuilding possible, the provision of a clean water supply from Loch Katrine, the housing

⁷³⁷ Ibid., p 114

⁷³⁸ Ibid., p 270

⁷³⁹ ..MATHESON, *City of Man*, p 157.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., p 161,162

achievements of the City Improvement Trust, and “its perfect service of sanitary inspection.”⁷⁴¹ The “wonderful” tramways, “improving” parks, “distinguished” policy of the ownership of public utilities, “the elevation” of city life would all be enhanced if the city would adopt a clear policy of town planning. The Glasgow of 1910, although clearly developing as a modern municipality, still displayed evidence of social deprivation and contained areas of great poverty, and the gap between these and the suburbs which Matheson extolled was being widened by the very achievements which he praised. Matheson does not appear fully to have realised this.

The reason for this may lie in the other area of his thought where Matheson’s romanticism is clear. The secular municipality which he admires so much has, in Matheson’s view a theological goal, the city of God, the Kingdom of God. “Any social order must stand in some veritable connection with the higher law of heaven. If it would be true and permanent it must recognise the presence and power of the living God.”⁷⁴² And so Matheson’s Kingdom of God turns out to bear a remarkable similarity to Thomas Chalmers’ godly commonwealth, which the process of urbanisation had made it impossible for Chalmers to transfer from the rural economy of Kilmany to the urban situation in Glasgow. Despite Matheson’s praise for it, municipalisation was not going to make the godly commonwealth any more easy to achieve

William Dickie

William Dickie brings this study full circle, for he was born in Paisley Abbey Schoolhouse five years before Patrick Brewster’s death. After ministries in Paisley.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., pp 201-210.

⁷⁴² M,ATHESON, W.S., *The Church and Social Problems* p 25

Rosehearty and Perth, Dickie was inducted to Partick Dowanhill Church in Glasgow in 1889.

Dickie's ministry saw the Dowanhill area of Partick grow from the village it was when he went there to a west end suburb when he left, and his ministry had to cope with the social problems which the absorption of the area in greater Glasgow brought with it. Almost immediately after his induction he started a club for young working men. "There are thousands of young men and women, " he wrote, "who parade our city streets for three or four hours every evening from want of some place to which they might possibly resort".⁷⁴³ As well as recreational facilities in a gymnasium the club provided tuition in such skills as woodwork and fretwork, and educational classes in, for example, chemistry.

As well as involvement with his congregation's social outreach, Dickie was appointed in 1909 Convener of the Unemployed Committee of the United Free Church, which combined with the Church of Scotland Presbytery of Glasgow to alleviate the social distress caused by trade depression and the resulting unemployment. In this role he found himself involved with David Watson of St Clements' in Glasgow's East End.

Dickie's social theology is contained in his *The Christian Ethics of Social Life*,⁷⁴⁴ which originated as a series of sermons in Dowanhill U.P. Church. The social problem was being discussed mainly along "economic, civic and materialistic lines"

⁷⁴³ "A Working Lad's Club – A Social Experiment" in *United Presbyterian Church Magazine*, 1896, p 65

⁷⁴⁴ DICKIE, W., 1903, *The Christian Ethics of Social Life*, London (DICKIE, *Ethics of Social Life*)

and Dickie wanted to examine the issues from the standpoint of Christian ethics.⁷⁴⁵ Unlike Matheson, Dickie's standpoint is entirely individualistic. At the outset he writes that he sees the individual at the centre of four concentric social circles – the family, the Church, society and humanity, and the social problem arises as a result of the individual's relationship to these four circles.⁷⁴⁶ Interestingly, he does not envisage the Church encompassing "society" and "humanity" but rather the Church as part of both. However Dickie is aware of the tension between the individual and the social aspect of the Kingdom of God, with the Church on the one hand preaching individual salvation while losing the social ideal of the Kingdom, or, alternatively, identifying itself with social movements and losing the stress on individual salvation.⁷⁴⁷ Dickie's resolution of the tension takes the route of individual salvation leading to social reform. "There can be no doubt" he says "that Christ's appeal was intensely personal". His call to repentance and demand for conversion were individualistic.⁷⁴⁸ There is no possibility of the regeneration of society until the individual is regenerated.⁷⁴⁹ Social ideals will be achieved "by the new life pulsating through the veins of redeemed men".⁷⁵⁰

But there can be as little doubt that Jesus had in view a social aim.

The individual was part of a great social organism, and between the part and the whole there was constant interaction. In becoming a citizen of the Kingdom a man not only adopted a new relation as an individual to the King, but he entered into a new relation to all his fellow-subjects and into a new relation to all his fellow creatures.

⁷⁴⁵ DICKIE, W., 1926, *History of Dowanhill Church*, Glasgow, p 122

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., p viii

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., p 127

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., p 128

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., p 41

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., p 43

A self-centred, self-complete life was not possible.⁷⁵¹

Although Dickie envisages the social ideals of the Kingdom of God being realised by redeemed individuals, he does not, like William Clow, assume that a regenerated society can be left to individuals who have been saved. Like Matheson, he envisages a dynamic relationship between the two. For example, Dickie says that although the Christian must work for social reform “he must go deeper than and beyond the mere social reformer. He must aim at the regeneration of men”.⁷⁵² That view introduces a expectation that as well as individual salvation being the engine of social reform, social reform can be the agent of spiritual regeneration. While an individual was to work for the Kingdom of God, in that pursuit the highest form of individuality is achieved. And a new social environment is required in which the redeemed individual can flourish.⁷⁵³ In an important passage for understanding Dickie’s view of the dynamic relationship between individual salvation and social reform, Dickie says unexceptionally that the salvation of the individual is a means to the salvation of society. But then he goes on

If we regard salvation as an act of grace it is thoroughly individualistic
- a transaction between God and the soul. If, on the other hand, we
regard it as a process of grace it is thoroughly social – transaction between
the regenerated soul and society. Man is saved *by* God *in* society and *for*
society. The salvation of the individual apart from any relations or
obligations to his social environment is not the normal method of Christ. He

⁷⁵¹ Ibid., p 128

⁷⁵² Ibid., p 99

⁷⁵³ Ibid., p 42

appeals to the individual to “repent” but he urges the appeal with the announcement that “the Kingdom of God is at hand”.⁷⁵⁴

Thus Dickie can make the extremely strong statement that “individual salvation is lost if social obligation was ignored”.⁷⁵⁵

Like almost everyone who wrote on the subject by this time, Dickie accepts that Kingdom and Church are not identical, but the Church “is the divinely appointed agency by which the Kingdom of God is to be realised in the world”.⁷⁵⁶ It is the Church’s role firstly to regenerate the individual, then to hold up high social ideals and in this way the Kingdom grows sporadically all over the world

Given two or three met in the name of Christ, then Christ is there, and where the King is the Kingdom has come. In his presence and fellowship the social ideals of the Kingdom fill the air, fire the imagination and impel to realisation. Others are attracted and respond, and the Kingdom expands – not by the accretion of men as they are, but by assimilation and transformation, as each enters into allegiance to Christ and becomes a new man. He becomes one of the brotherhood which acknowledges its obligation not only to those brothers who are within but to the possible brothers who are without; for the new social ideal of brotherhood has within it a thirst for spiritual and social dominion which can never be satisfied until the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is coextensive with the world.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., p 117

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., p 128

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid., p 113

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., p 133

To describe the sort of individual he envisages both transforming and being transformed by a renewed society within the Kingdom of God, Dickie introduces the category of “social sainthood”. Social saints “are to be the living social sources, who are to multiply themselves in all to whom they impart the new life,”⁷⁵⁸ and to translate the mind of Christ “into the whole practical life of the age – into laws, institutions, commerce, literature, art’ into domestic, civic. Social and political relations; into national and international doings – in this sense to bring in the Kingdom of God”.⁷⁵⁹

Dickie does not say in *The Christian Ethics of Social Life* that the book is a series of sermons he preached, though he does in his history of Dowanhill Church.⁷⁶⁰ Unlike Watson, Clow and Matheson’s works, allowance has to be made for pulpit rhetoric. For example, to insist that everyone’s life is lived within four concentric circles, the second of which is the Church is explicable if the audience is a Christian congregation. It would be naïve to make that claim, even in the early years of the twentieth century, if the intended audience was far wider.

Dickie makes the usual distinction between the Church and the Kingdom of God, which, Dickie says, drawing on the parables of the Kingdom, is a subtle influence like leaven, growing, like the mustard seed, expanding so that all can find shelter in its branches, a net enmeshing all sorts and conditions. However Dickie the preacher immediately elides the difference he has just stated. “It is the Church which hides the

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., p 44

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid., p 46

⁷⁶⁰ p 122

leaven in the meal, puts the mustard seed into the ground, casts the net into the sea, sows the good seed in the field”.⁷⁶¹

Given that Dickie’s aim was to encourage his Dowanhill congregation to share his concern for a better society, it is possible that the view he expresses that Jesus’ teaching of the Kingdom of God is more concerned with duties rather than rights also reflects the nature of the audience to whom he originally addressed the sermons. Jesus, Dickie observed,

does not instigate the poor to insist upon their rights. He insists upon the rich remembering their duty as stewards of the good things of God. He says nothing of the wounded traveller’s right to be succoured by the passing priest or Levite, but he commends the Samaritan for discharging his duty to humanity by his neighbourly service. He does not preach the slave’s right to liberty, but he preaches each man’s duty of love towards all. He will do nothing to help one enforce high rights to a family inheritance. He warns the complainer against the sin of covetousness.⁷⁶²

Similarly the difference in emphasis between saying that society is regenerated individually “through faith in, and submission to Jesus Christ”⁷⁶³ and that “individual salvation is lost if social obligation is ignored”⁷⁶⁴ may again reflect the requirements of different sermons and what Dickie perceived to be the needs of a very evangelical

⁷⁶¹ DICKIE, *Ethics of Social Life* p 113

⁷⁶² Ibid., p 129,130

⁷⁶³ Ibid., 132

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., p 128

congregation of well-off people who had moved from the urban environment of Partick to the western extremity of the city.

The Kingdom of God as the Currency of Debate

Robert Flint continued to state his view about the Kingdom of God right up until his death in 1910. Probably one of the reasons for this was that the Kingdom of God continued to be the focus of debate, particularly within the United Free Church, and so Flint's re-statements of his views on the Kingdom were made not in theological isolation but in the context of ongoing controversy.

Throughout most of the early years of the twentieth century, the Convener of the United Free Church's Home Mission Committee, and then of its Committee on Social Problems was Robert Drummond, minister of Lothian Road U F Church in Edinburgh. In his autobiography, he wrote of having had as convener "a glorious battle to fight against conservative obscurantism".⁷⁶⁵

The more our spirits are saturated with our Lord's conception of his own mission to bring in the Kingdom of God, the more we realise that Christianity is as essentially social as it is intensely individual, the more also we will feel that for the prosecution of its mission, it must deal with social evils as they hinder its progress. We will feel that we are as truly carrying on Home Mission when we are moving local authorities to remove a slum as when we are preaching the need for the cleansing of the heart and renewing of the spirit.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁵ DRUMMOND, R.J., 1923, *Lest we Forge, Reminiscences of a Nonagenarian*, London, p 98

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., p 97,98

Drummond was undoubtedly committed to the social implications of the Kingdom of God. In this work it becomes clear that his understanding of the Kingdom of God differed from that of Watson, Clow, Matheson and Dickie in four significant respects.

In 1900 Drummond published the Kerr lectures on the early Church which he had delivered that year,⁷⁶⁷ Drummond recognises that the phrase, the Kingdom of God, was regularly used by Jesus but he believes infrequently as Jesus' ministry progressed and seldom in private conversation with his disciples.⁷⁶⁸ From this Drummond concludes that it is a mistaken interpretation of the teaching of Jesus that the Kingdom of God "can be made to appear as a chief category in Christ's thought".⁷⁶⁹ The phrase receded in importance for Jesus, and was replaced by others, and so it is not surprising that the Kingdom of God was not important in the view of the early Church.⁷⁷⁰

Second, Drummond argues that Paul subsumed the doctrine of the Kingdom of God into his understanding of what it means for a Christian to be "in Christ", and Paul's Christology generally. "As the Christ therefore came into prominence, the need to enlarge on the Kingdom vanished".⁷⁷¹ So, while Drummond recognises that the Kingdom of God is both spiritual and social, it becomes in his thought more metaphorical than real.

⁷⁶⁷ DRUMMOND, R.J., 1900, *The Relation of the Apostolic Teaching to the Teaching of Christ*, Edinburgh

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., p 179

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., p 183

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid., p 182

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., p 184

Third, although insisting that Kingdom and Church are separate, Drummond comes very close to regarding them as sharing an identity. “There is”, he observes,

little difficulty in recognising how close is the connection between the Church and the Kingdom of God. On their ideal side, and in so far as they express the thought of the community, they are identical.

Where they diverge is in the fact that on Christ’s lips in Kingdom the emphasis is thrown on King and Constitution, in Church it is on the community in which the king’s writ runs. In the Church the Kingdom finds an embodiment of itself ever more complete as the community grows, and at the same time an instrument for its own extension.⁷⁷²

The final difference in emphasis between Drummond and those of his contemporaries whose views have been examined is that Drummond sees the realisation of the Kingdom of God as the initial move towards a Kingdom which is far more eschatological and apocalyptic.⁷⁷³

In view of these published views of 1900 on the Kingdom of God, it is surprising to find Drummond, in introducing the first Report of the Committee on Social Questions, saying “It has long seemed to me that the great social awakening of the present day is the fruit of the renewed interest in the teaching of Christ which some forty years ago accompanied the recognition of the place which the Kingdom of God had in his teaching”.⁷⁷⁴ However it should be recognised that the serious difference of emphasis had not emerged in the United Free Church General Assembly in 1900

⁷⁷² Ibid., pp 191,192

⁷⁷³ Ibid., p 202

⁷⁷⁴ *Proceedings and Debates*, 1911, Proceedings, p 336

when Drummond delivered his Kerr Lectures. By the time the Committee on Social Problems was formed and reporting, there was a need to defend the significance of the Kingdom against the views of, for example, William Clow. In the same 1911 speech, Drummond went on to say that the recognition of the place of the Kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus “was enormously advanced in our own land by our late Professors Bruce and Candlish”. A comparison has already been made between the views of Candlish and Bruce on the Kingdom of God, and those of Robert Flint, which predate the writings of the two Glasgow Free Church teachers by over twenty years⁷⁷⁵ It is perhaps understandable, but less than fair, that Drummond should attribute the interest in the Kingdom of God to their work rather than Flint’s.

In his 1911 speech, Drummond goes on to describe the hostile reaction of those who preached the Kingdom of God on earth as “grown cold religiously and given over to materialism”. He says that critics of the Free Church scholars like Bruce and Candlish, who saw the Kingdom of God as an important theme in Jesus’ teaching were “exalting the King and belittling the Kingdom” when they insisted that it was Christ’s headship of the Church which mattered, If the Church would only people in touch with Christ then they would discover “the fatherhood of God and a brotherhood of men rich enough in spiritual content and affection to secure that the Kingdom will come, and the will be done in earth as in heaven”. In other words, they believed that individual conversion would guarantee the Kingdom. But Drummond concludes that the evangelical and social Gospel go hand in hand towards the Kingdom of God.

⁷⁷⁵ See above p xx (TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION)

The tension between the two emphases in the Kingdom of God, evangelical and social, runs through all the reports and debates in the U.F. Assembly between 1904 and 1911, and most often takes the form of the differing view on whether the Church should act in conjunction with secular and municipal authorities or whether the Church's role is entirely separate, distinct and to be kept apart from political policy and activity.

As we will see, there is evidence of the tension between the differing views of the part the Church played in advancing the Kingdom of God in the early debates of the United Free Church General assembly but it was in 1908 that they flared into open conflict. That year the Life and Work Committee was instructed to draw up a clear statement of the Church's doctrine of the Kingdom of God, and to report the following year,

The timing is significant. The 1909 General Assembly was to meet against the background of the huge expansion of social welfare legislation undertaken by the Liberal Government since 1906, and in particular Lloyd George's People's Budget which he outlined a month or so before the Assembly met.

The Liberal Government's welfare programme started the year it was elected when it permitted local authorities to increase rates in order to subsidise school meals. The Old Age Pensions Act of 1908 was providing a modest, non-contributory pension of five shillings a week for more than million people over the age of seventy by 1911. The National Insurance Act of 1911 enabled all workers between the ages of sixteen and seventy, whose earnings did not reach the income tax threshold to claim sickness

benefit in return for a contribution of four pence a week from men and three pence a week from women, with contributions also from employers and the state. The Act also provided that those in seasonal or cyclical employment would be provided with an income of seven shillings a week for up to five weeks of unemployment in each year in return for a contribution of two and a half pence from each employee.

Those in the Churches from the days of Patrick Brewster onwards, who had been expressing concern for the old, the sick and the unemployed were bound to regard these measures as of enormous importance. Those who saw the alleviation of poverty and the improvement of social conditions as steps towards the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth will have regarded the government's social welfare legislation as the sort of "good laws" which Robert Flint had argued contributed towards the Kingdom's advance. Those, like Scott Matheson and David Watson who believed that a redistribution of wealth within the nation will have welcomed the element of redistribution in Lloyd George's People's budget, which both increased the standard rate of income tax and imposed a tax of six pence of every pound of income above £3000 of those whose total income exceeded £5000. And those, like Marshall Lang in the Church of Scotland and William Clow in the Free Church, who represented a large body of opinion which traced social deprivation to excessive alcoholic consumption will have applauded the increased taxes on beer and spirits. Some, however, may have entertained a degree of anxiety that if the state moved irreversibly into the area of social welfare, the role of the Church as the traditional provider of support for the poor would be eroded. If the Kingdom of God was to be defined in terms of meeting social needs, there might prove to be a decreasingly important part for the Church to play in advancing that Kingdom. These

considerations underlie the debates on the Kingdom of God which the United Free Church of Scotland began in 1904.

The report of the Life and Work Committee to the General Assembly of 1904 expressed the view that co-operation with other agencies did not imply a questioning of the Church's unique answer to social problems. "While we join with every movement, political, economic, social, which is fitted to improve the material condition of the poor by lessening their burden or increasing their comfort, we feel that the problem of poverty can only be solved by getting back to the moral foundations on which all human well-being can alone rest". Human conditions can only be equalised, the Report concluded, by heavenly consolations.⁷⁷⁶ The Convener of the Life and Work Committee, Dr John Smith, anticipated that the Committee's examination of the social influence of Christianity might take two or three years but meanwhile asked the Assembly to "commend to ministers and office-bearers earnest consideration of the causes of poverty, and in particular the means whereby the destitute and fallen may be recovered to virtue and true religion".⁷⁷⁷

The Life and Work Committee report to the Assembly of 1905 was less proprietorial but still rather patronising when it stated, "The Church recognises the authority of municipalities in their own sphere, and appreciates the value of their service to the common weal. Organised for the spiritual welfare of the people, the Church is free to welcome all light upon social problems, and improvements in social methods, by which obstacles may be removed, better conditions of living may be secured, prevailing evils may be lessened or removed, and her members may come, as for

⁷⁷⁶ *Proceedings and Debates*, 1904, Reports p 4

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Proceedings, pp 209,210

social so for spiritual ends, into helpful and sympathetic contact with the masses of the people”.⁷⁷⁸ The seconder of the report, Dr Joseph Corbett, who had been convener of the Home Mission Committee of the United Presbyterian Church, insisted that a deeper commitment to faith would encourage Christian activity in the social field, and both would “hasten the coming of the Kingdom of God”.⁷⁷⁹

The Life and Work Committee Report to the General Assembly of 1906 contained the first formal suggestion that the Kingdom of God was to be reached through individual effort and activity, and the first acknowledgment of the tension that was to come between the evangelical and the social Gospel. Of social issues, the Report said that while “many of the problems lie entirely within the civic sphere, and must be dealt with by magisterial enactment, the Church has a well-defined function in moulding public opinion and in holding forth higher ideals. If the State and municipal councils are to do the work, the Church, through her people, must insist upon the election to public boards of men and women who fear God and love righteousness. Nor must the demand for reforms be uttered in timorous or feeble tones”.⁷⁸⁰ This was a clear expression of the view that the Kingdom of God will be realised through the faith and commitment of Christian individuals in their capacity as concerned and responsible citizens. The Report also indicated that the improvement of social wellbeing in itself was insufficient. Improved conditions were necessary but without people renewed by the grace of God, social improvement would not be achieved. “The Church must not stop at social work, but bring to (people) the Gospel....which is still the only effective power for social regeneration”.⁷⁸¹

⁷⁷⁸ *Proceedings and Debates*, 1905, Reports, p 7

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Proceedings, p 165

⁷⁸⁰ *Reports and Proceedings*, Reports, 1906, p 6

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p 8

In 1907, the Life and Work Committee brought the tension between the two views of the Church's role in social problems openly into its report. There was a discussion of "Institutional Churches", which had been pioneered in America, and which made use of Church buildings to provide recreational and leisure facilities, educational and social opportunities for the underprivileged. The Report questioned whether the sort of direct involvement in providing resources to combat poverty had been fully considered but stated that it would probably be concluded that the Church's role and responsibility "is more in the direction of inspiring its members to promote and support such agencies in their capacity as citizens"..⁷⁸² While recognising that to some, active involvement in social issues appeared to display a lack of confidence in the inherent power of the Gospel and salvation by grace alone, the Life and Work Committee rejected that view, claiming to have evidence from an experiment in social mission in Manchester that "Everything is done with the Kingdom of God in view".

Although Reports to the United Free Church General Assemblies on social reform from 1904 to 1907 referred to the Kingdom of God, these Reports stimulated very little by way of debate. The Life and Work Committee reported on housing conditions in 1905 and 1906, and was working on a report on sweated labour for 1908, and despite the hinting at division on its practical response to the social question in the Report of 1907, so long as the reports and speeches did not tackle the theology which lay behind the reports, then tension which was later to be expressed in very different views of the Kingdom of God did not emerge. References to the need to study the issues and educate the Church on the problems were unlikely to provoke

⁷⁸² *Reports and Proceedings, Reports*, 1907, p 8

any debate, and so long as what required to be done was left suitably vague, unlikely to produce disagreement. These were years when the General Assembly of the U. F. Church used the language of the Kingdom of God in its debates on social issues, but more as a rhetorical device than a theological reality. This was shown very clearly in David Paulin's speech to the General Assembly of 1907. "Anyone who has seen, as I have, the listening faces of hundred of men, turned towards one as he speaks earnestly and simply of the things pertaining to the Kingdom" Paulin said, "must be satisfied that the movement [towards it] is one that should receive our unqualified and enthusiastic approval.....We believe that by the guidance of the Spirit of God, our Church will in time arrive at a clearer comprehension of its duty in regard to methods of Christian work, which are full of interest, and which are fraught with great possibilities to the Kingdom of God".⁷⁸³

However, eight Synods and Presbyteries were not prepared to give the Life and Work Committee time to await the Spirit's guidance, and they overtured the 1908 General Assembly asking for a fresh look at how the Church fulfilled its social mission, and perhaps the appointment of a specially qualified person to guide the Home Mission and Life and Work Committees in this area. However the debate on the overtures on social work took place against the background of a speech earlier on the same day by William M Clow, which attacked the fundamental principle of the Church's direct involvement in social issues.⁷⁸⁴ George Reith, who edited the Reports and Proceedings of the United Free Church General Assembly and also published his personal reminiscences of each of them from 1900 to 1929 described part of Clow's speech as "in very poor taste" and Clow himself as "a minister whose gifts and graces

⁷⁸³ Ibid, Proceedings, p 188

⁷⁸⁴ *Reports and Proceedings*, 1908, Proceedings pp 259-260

were honoured by all, but who had an unfortunate tendency to make tactless and ill-advised remarks”. Clow had been chosen to second the adoption of the Home Mission Committee Report. Astonishingly, he said that he was opposed the views of Dr Robert Drummond, the Convener of the Home Mission Committee, who had presented the Report, and, he supposed, from many others in their conviction that the Church should deal with “such questions as the housing of the poor, and the poverty of the home, and the squalor of the cities”. He said that the business of the Church was conversion and after conversion better social conditions will come. “I, for one, fear lest this straining of men’s minds towards the state of the body politic and the condition of labour and the homes is not perilous and injurious to our one paramount duty – the proclaiming of the Gospel of Christ our Lord. Clow went on to claim that the Salvation Army won its reputation for its concern for people’s spiritual condition, not their physical welfare. “They have fallen from that high ideal. They are now giving the strength which they once expended in bringing people to Christ, to establishing bureaux and labour homes, to colonising and to hotels and banks”. Clow claimed that a glance at the sermon titles in Church advertisements in Saturday newspapers would show that those he described as “weak men” were seeking popular approval by preaching about the housing question or the condition of the poor.

Towards the conclusion of his speech, Clow picked up on a distinction made by Robert Drummond in his opening speech between the Christian Church and the Christian people. The Christian Church’s function is to make Christian people. The Christian people’s function is to engage in the agencies and activities of the secular world. “What Christian people ought to do and can do, the Christian Church need not attempt. There are other societies *divinely ordained* [my emphasis] to do these works

of righteousness besides the Church. There is the Christian state, the Christian city, the Christian family. There are many other organisations and societies. I take a part so far as I can in all of these, but I am not going to call upon the Christian Church to take up the special work of the Christian state, the Christian city or the Christian family. Its own function is nobler and more imperative". It is a measure of Clow's conservatism, and his failure to read the signs of the times that he could speak of a "Christian" state or city when in reality it was no longer possible to do so.

As was clear in the examination of Clow's main contribution to social criticism, *Christ and the Social Order*, Clow's distinction between the function of the Church and the Christian person depends on a doctrine of the separation of Church and Kingdom as absolute as that held by Robert Flint, though involving a differentiation of functions which Flint would not have accepted.⁷⁸⁵

Clow's speech to the 1908 General Assembly was important for a number of reasons. Those who wanted social and political engagement had seized the initiative by overturing the General Assembly. Clow's speech on the Home Mission Committee Report, which preceded the the debate on the overtures, guaranteed that the debate on the overtures would not be a repeat of the earlier Assemblies' bland discussion but would be conducted at a level which revealed the wide gap there was between those responsible for bringing the overtures to the Assembly and people like William Clow. Secondly Clow's speech became a rallying cry for those who agreed with him to be more vocal in the expression of their deep reservations about the course of action on which the Church seemed up until then to have been set. And thirdly, despite the

⁷⁸⁵ See below pp (TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION)

George's Reith's comments about Clow in his reminiscences of the United Free Church Assemblies, the speech gave Clow a prominence which until then he had not had. Three years later, when there was an election in the Assembly for the Church's Chair of Practical Theology in Glasgow, between Clow and Robert J Drummond, the Convener of the Home Mission Committee, whose report sparked off Clow's speech, Clow won very clearly – an indication not only of his new importance but also of the level of support there was for his opposition to the more extreme social activists in the United Free Church.

Donald Smith's judgment on the debate of 1908 is that "judging from the speeches, the two elements appeared to be fairly well balanced in the General Assembly".⁷⁸⁶ However of the twelve speeches made, nine were in favour of approving the overtures, differing only on which committee ought most appropriately to consider them. Smith says that as the result of this debate "the Assembly took the notable step of instructing the Life and Work Committee to investigate some of the leading social questions of the day and to report on them to the next Assembly", and he goes on to say that the result is an apparent contradiction of the view of George Reith in his reminiscences of United Free Church Assemblies.⁷⁸⁷ Reith had written that the overtures and the reports of the Home Mission and Life and Work Committees, and many of the speeches on the debates they raised, introduced a new note that the call for social reform was almost a preliminary to the Gospel. His judgment was that many members of the Assembly

felt that though the projects of social service were excellent in their way, and appealed to some of the best instincts of good men, there

⁷⁸⁶ SMITH, *Passive Obedience* p 341-2

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid., p 342

was a real danger that the primary function of the Church to press the Gospel on the individual conscience would tend to become of secondary importance. To get at the mass through the individual rather than seek the individual through the mass seemed to them to be supremely the method of Christ, which his disciples were bound to follow. *The above remarks are not so much matter drawn from Assembly speeches as reflections of talk amongst the members afterwards in the freer environment of intercourse in the corridors and the smoking room.*⁷⁸⁸[My emphasis]

Donald Smith is inclined to dismiss Reith's judgment as a reflection "of Reith's own conservative social bias than of the feelings of the Assembly as a whole" in favour of Smith's judgment that the 1908 Assembly took a notable step.⁷⁸⁹ However although Reith's attitude was clearly very similar to Clow's, Reith is a shrewd commentator on the UF General Assemblies, who was able to recall matters which were popularly received in the Assembly. It seems unlikely that he would have invented a mood, critical of the developing attitude towards social questions if he had not sensed it himself. Crucially, Smith prefaces his remarks about the new note he recognised in 1908 by saying "It was not as yet very clear but it became clearer in subsequent Assemblies: the call for social service as almost a necessary preliminary to the Gospel".⁷⁹⁰ It was Clow's alerting of the Assembly to this new note, and the groundwell of support for him which Reith sensed in the corridors and the smoking room, which justifies the conclusion that the 1908 Assembly's decision was less

⁷⁸⁸ REITH, G., *Reminiscences of the United Free Church General assembly, 1900-1929*, Edinburgh, pp 93,94 (*Reminiscences*)

⁷⁸⁹ SMITH., *Passive Obedience*, p 343n

⁷⁹⁰ REITH, *Reminiscences*, p 93

clearly a commitment to an involvement in social reform than the reports it enabled to be produced in subsequent years, or indeed the speeches which were made, critical of Clow's views, would seem to suggest.

After the overtures had been introduced to the Assembly, Dr Thomas Whitelaw of Kilmarnock said he agreed with Clow that the solution to social problems lay with the state, but the Church had a responsibility too. While the Church's proper function is to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ

and to make men and women good citizens as well as heirs of the Kingdom of heaven, and that her gospel contains the divinely appointed panacea for the ills of life – of society no less than of the individual – she ought also to remember that she can do much to help on the solution of these problems, and to set up the Kingdom of heaven upon earth by shedding the light of revealed truth on the problems in question, and by lending a hand to all efforts that seek the betterment of society.⁷⁹¹

Later in his speech Whitelaw again cited Clow's insistence that the primary function of the Church is to preach the Gospel, which is the only panacea for society's ills. "I am however one of those who think the Church of Christ cannot shake herself free from a large measure of responsibility for these problems". Whitelaw was followed in the debate by Scott Matheson of Dumbarton, whose views, as has been noted, reflected a view of the Church's role in the promotion of the Kingdom of God, very different from Clow's. Matheson too agreed that the Church's first duty is "to preach

⁷⁹¹ *Reports and Proceedings*, 1908, Proceedings, p 266

the Gospel of the grace of God and uphold it as the most powerful corrective of social ills”. He quoted a member of the U.F. Presbytery of Dumbarton, in its debate on the overture it sent to the Assembly as expressing the fear that social issues lay outside the province of the Church which is a spiritual body existing to meet spiritual needs. “I would state it differently,” Matheson said, “and from the standpoint of the Kingdom of God, say that the Church is a spiritual body for social ends, designed to embody personal and social righteousness on the earth, to link the old evangel to social elevation, to weld together and the forces of spiritual revival and social reform”.⁷⁹² Professor J Y Simpson of New College proposed the setting up of a specific department of Church and Labour within the Church. While not mentioning Clow by name, he addressed “those who say that such enquiry and such setting right of social wrong is no part of the Church’s mission” and he replied that that the Church of the New Testament had grown and flourished under conditions which demanded that primitive Christianity addressed social issues. “Which suggests” Simpson went on, in language very similar to Robert Flint’s

that in the re-discovery and reinterpretation of its social obligations,
the Church of the twentieth century may be born anew.....if Jesus Christ
be the king of all life, surely the Church, as working for him, should
demand that all life obey Christ and the political, social and industrial
spheres are a great part of human life. Christ really meant his Kingdom
to come on this earth, and all Kingdoms of this earth, including the
Kingdoms of trade, industry and politics, were to become a portion of his
Kingdom.⁷⁹³

⁷⁹² *Reports and Proceedings*, 1908, Proceedings, p 268

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, p 269

Rev Frederick Rae of Beechgrove Church in Aberdeen made the most direct attack on Clow, who, he said reflected “a traditional view of the Church to this problem, which he hoped they were leaving behind,”⁷⁹⁴ and Thomas Binnie, a Glasgow elder who had given evidence to the Presbytery’s Commission on Housing, gave Clow most support. He thought the Church’s business was “to lay down principles and leave men to carry them out”.⁷⁹⁵ Dr James Wells of Pollokshields supported the overtures, but saw no connection between what Jesus said about seeking the Kingdom of God and the solution to social problems. He had started his ministry in the Wynds of Glasgow “alongside humble men and women but who had great spiritual power. Their living faith in Christ developed every noble impulse. They solved social problems without saying a word about them.”⁷⁹⁶

Later on during the 1908 Assembly, the report of the Life and Work Committee which dealt with the issue of sweated labour was proposed by Professor George Adam Smith of Glasgow, who continued the criticism others had made of Clow’s speech. He said

I am one of those who deprecate the opposition that some have sought in this Assembly to raise between evangelistic and social workIt has been said that the Church should leave a very great deal to the Municipality and the State. Moderator, I am one of those Church-workers who would leave just as much as possible of this kind of work to forces and individuals outside the Church. But when you have done that, when you have left all you can with a good conscience leave of social work, because individuals or institutions or societies

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid., p 270

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid., p 272

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid., p 274

outside the Church are taking it up there still remain in the experience of those who have been privileged to look into the needs of work in this direction – there still remain needs of social work which no one else than the Church is fulfilling, and which therefore stand out as the Church's particular duty.⁷⁹⁷

By the end of the 1908 General Assembly the lines of conflict had been drawn. It is clear from the contributions to the various debates that both sides of the divide had accepted without question two of Robert Flint's fundamental convictions, perhaps as expressed by someone from the Free Church tradition like A.B. Bruce, but first expressed by Flint in his sermons on the Kingdom of Christ: first, that the Church and the Kingdom of God were not one and the same, and that the Church's role was to work towards the Kingdom; and secondly that other agencies, municipal, secular, social and political all had contributions to make towards that Kingdom of God. The issue which divided the United Free Church was whether the Church's role was an actively participative one, organising itself measures of social reform, contributing itself to the palliative measures required to ease the extremes of poverty or homelessness, or an inspirationally participative one, creating the sort of Christians who would carry the social implications of the Gospel both into the Council Chamber and into the slums.

The Report of the Life and Work Committee to the following year's General Assembly attempted to provide a definitive and inclusive statement about the nature of the Kingdom of God. The Committee had been asked by the 1908 General

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid., p 394

Assembly “to take into consideration in what ways the Church may best show her sympathy with, and lend assistance to the various movements that aim at the betterment of society” and in particular to consider Professor J.Y. Simpson’s proposal that a Department of Church and Labour be established. Clearly the Committee realised that its specific responses to these remits would depend on an answer to the question which the Assembly had never resolved of what the Church’s role was in the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Various conferences were arranged with secular agencies and socialist organisations in order further to gather the facts regarding poverty and industrial unrest, a series of sub-committees was appointed to look into specific subjects such as whether economics and sociology should be introduced into the training for the ministry and the propriety of establishing a Church and Labour Department, the problem of unemployment and the consequences of farmed-out houses. The first sub-committee was given the task of outlining Jesus’ social teaching, which the sub-committee recognised at the outset was contained in Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The Committee therefore outlined what it understood Jesus to have meant by the Kingdom of God.⁷⁹⁸

It is clear from the language used throughout the document that the prevailing view in the sub-committee, and certainly the one which the main Life and Work Committee endorsed in its report to the 1909 General Assembly was a view of the Kingdom which would not have caused much anxiety to William Clow. At the outset the Kingdom is described as a “spiritual reality.. It is a society composed of children of one Father. This experience of sonship is Christ’s first requirement. All his social aims and hopes are based on his demand for this personal, spiritual regeneration. And

⁷⁹⁸ *Reports and Proceedings*, 1909, Proceedings, “Appendix to Report on Church Life and Work” p 15

the preaching of the Kingdom is therefore the proclamation of the power of God's grace to deal with the needs of the world". To balance the individualism of this initial statement, the report then goes on to say that the Kingdom of God is also a social ideal. In rhetorical language somewhat reminiscent of the references to the Kingdom in the early debates in the United Free Church on social reform, the Kingdom is described as "a brotherhood, a society of men and women living simple, happy free lives, serving one another in love. It is a regenerated social system". The social gospel is Jesus' prediction of the consummation of his Kingdom. The statement goes on to say that Jesus intended the social ideal of his Kingdom to be realised gradually through his disciples, and by his Spirit working through them. The aim of the Kingdom is social regeneration as well as spiritual renewal.

Donald Smith describes this statement as clearly displaying the influence of the new social and theological liberalism, largely because the statement goes on to infer from the initial description of the Kingdom of God that there are "elements in the present economic system which make the life Christ calls men to live hardly possible – such as unduly low wages, sweating of labour and oppressive conditions of work....Extreme inequalities of wealth and poverty.....can hardly be said to reflect the mind of Christ (and) so far as modern conditions foster the alienation of industrial and other classes from one another, the whole spirit of Christ's words is against these conditions".⁷⁹⁹ However the statement is much more of a compromise with the conservative element in the Assembly than Smith's judgment implies. It is true, as Smith says, that the statement contained criticism of the present social system, but the United Free Church Assembly, as well as the Church of Scotland's Assembly, had

⁷⁹⁹ *Reports and Proceedings*, 1909, Proceedings, "Appendix to Report on Church Life and Work" p 16

previously criticised low wages, sweated labour, poor working conditions, and extremes of wealth and poverty. The significantly conservative element in the statement was that it envisaged the eventual reform of these elements through the action of individuals. Social regeneration was to be achieved by Christ's disciples, and the Church's role was primarily to make disciples. In the references to the Kingdom of God as a spiritual and a social ideal, the statement is theologically specific in relation to the spiritual ideal. Everything depends on personal, spiritual regeneration. This contrasts with the vague, utopian language in which the Kingdom as a social ideal is expressed – "a society of men and women living simple, happy, free lives". While there is indeed criticism of the existing social system, it is notable that in the specific references to the Kingdom of God there is no mention of commitment to social justice in the present, nor to the alleviation of social distress or the reforms of social structures, which speakers in Assembly debates had described as integral to the Church's role in the establishment of the Kingdom.

The 1909 General Assembly set up a Special Committee on Social Problems to pursue among other issues, whether a Department of Church and Labour should be established,. This committee produced an interim report the following year, asking for more time. However, two Glasgow elders, Buyers Black, described by Donald Smith as "a prominent figure in the Tory party"⁸⁰⁰ and John Stephen, the shipbuilder tried to abort the proposal. In what Reith described as "an animated debate", they unsuccessfully attempted to persuade the Assembly to "decline to authorise any committee to interfere in the name of the Church with Labour and economic problems, or with duties pertaining thereto, which properly devolved on individual

⁸⁰⁰ SMITH, *Passive Obedience*, p 351n

citizens or on the State.....The vote showed an overwhelming majority in favour of the Special Committee's proposal".⁸⁰¹

It was the Report of the Home Mission Committee in 1908 which provoked William Clow's attack on the Church's growing involvement in social issues as a departure from its primary task. The Secretary of that Home Mission Committee, Dr John Young, was the Moderator of the 1910 General Assembly and devoted almost the whole of a substantial opening address in the Assembly of that year to the subject of the Church's social concern within the context of the Kingdom of God, for the establishment of which, he said, the Church must attempt great things⁸⁰² because for Jesus, the Kingdom was the primary object of life.⁸⁰³ So "what men talk of as the social problem is the religious problem of the day – primarily a problem for the Church".⁸⁰⁴

Young was determined to defend the view that the nature of the Kingdom of God required the Church to be involved in social issues. "The Church and nation" he said, have suffered much from the tacit assumption that the religious and the secular life can be lived in separate compartments, that religion may be kept apart from business transactions, from social relations, from civic duties and from political opinions".⁸⁰⁵ He argued that there were poor industrial and labour relations because "the Church of Christ has been too content to assume that large departments in private and public life are outside its sphere of influence, and has failed to declare the whole counsel of God as revealed, in its bearing upon social and civic relations, upon trade and industry,

⁸⁰¹ REITH, *Reminiscences*, p 115

⁸⁰² *Reports and Proceedings*, 1910, Proceedings p 45

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.*, p 46

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p 44

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p 51

upon the economics and politics which rule the lives of men and of nations”.⁸⁰⁶ He vigorously defended politics as a Christian vocation and asked “Why should politics be generally looked upon as ‘knaveish tricks’ except that they rhyme so in the national anthem?”⁸⁰⁷

Young’s speech, however, was a very carefully crafted one. For every reference to the Kingdom of God as involving involvement with the secular or political world, there was a balancing passage, making clear the limits Young saw to that involvement. However critical the Church needs to be of “social theories and political nostrums”, it cannot but be sympathetic to the pleas for justice they contain.⁸⁰⁸ He insists that the headship of Christ involves his rule in every aspect of life including business and civic life, but the Church has to “teach men to face their duties rather than clamour for their rights; to care more for the excellence of workmanship than for the standard of wages”.⁸⁰⁹ The record indicates that this remark was greeted with applause. Young says at one point that “the Church has to do primarily with the individual, and to aim at the change of heart which brings him into a right relation with God” but immediately adds that the Church cannot be indifferent to the sort of housing or the social conditions in which the individual has to live. A little later in his speech the balance is struck the other way round.

There is no more serious hindrance to the progress of the Church
and to the prosperity of the nation than the apathy of Christian
men and women in regard to social wrongs. The Church has a
duty to discharge in guiding public opinion and stimulating action

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid., p 52

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid., p 51

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid., p 48

by civic authorities in regard to matters which affect prejudicially the religion and morals of the community.⁸¹⁰

However almost immediately Young goes on to claim that the Church may not be able to become actively involved in schemes of social improvement or areas of social reform because “it must scrupulously avoid all entanglements with class prejudice or party spirit”. And yet, he continues, the Church “must also stand free from all complicity, active or passive, with social, industrial or civic wrong, and it must not fail in a clear, out-spoken testimony to the teaching of the word of God in relation to every evil or injustice which hinders the establishment of his Kingdom on earth”.⁸¹¹

It is when Young turns to discuss how the Church relates to society that he makes clear where he stands. In matters which involve the Kingdom of God, the courts of the Church can only make representations on matters “*upon which there is a large measure of common agreement*”. [my emphasis] The Church must scrupulously avoid even the appearance of trespassing beyond its own province, just as it jealously guards its own province against interference with its rights.

There are not wanting in our day strong temptations placed before the Church, and conspicuous instances of their being yielded to, by which the Church may be secularised to a larger extent than the state or community is regenerated, and there may take place a socialisation or nationalisation of religion, at the expense of religion ceasing to be a vital and energising force in the national life.....

Like its Master, the Church must refuse to act as judge and divider

⁸¹⁰ Ibid., p 50

⁸¹¹ Ibid

in matters that fall to be judged in other courts, to be entangled in affairs of state, or municipal politics which do not touch conscience or the liberties of Christ's House, or to be exploited by interested parties for secular ends and worldly schemes.⁸¹²

The reported answer of Jesus when he was asked to adjudicate in disputed inheritance, "Who made me a judge or a divider over you?"⁸¹³ was a favourite text of those who wanted to limit the Church's engagement in secular affairs.

Despite the vigorous attempt to be balanced, Young's speech to the General Assembly cannot be seen as other than an endorsement of the view that the Church's role is to inspire individuals with the Christian motivation to social reform, nor to question the structural causes of social problems or to be involved as an institution in their solution. His attempt to achieve a balance at a time when the Church's attitude to social questions was potentially divisive is understandable. But ultimately that balance meant that Young's insistence that the Kingdom of God required a concern for social justice became little more than rhetoric when he envisaged the Church's engagement with society being limited and circumscribed by the need, for example, only to comment where there was widespread agreement and his refusal to countenance any trespass beyond its own province. Perhaps Young was unable to recognise that the limitations he placed on the Church's actions effectively undermined the claims he made for its engagement with the secular world for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Perhaps he was employing a strategy, not unknown in the

⁸¹² Ibid., p 49,50

⁸¹³ St Luke Chapter 12 verse 14

world of ecclesiastical politics, of adopting the language of radicalism while emptying it of all real content.

The General Assembly of 1911 continued to display the same degree of tension about the Church's role in social affairs. Young's successor as Moderator of the United Free Church Assembly in 1911 was the Glasgow Pollokshields minister, Dr James Wells, who came from the Free Church side of the united Church. Wells had been an assistant in the Wynd and then minister there between 1862 and 1867, and in 1867 became minister of the Barony Free Church. So, as he told the Assembly, he had spent a lifetime studying at close quarters the burning social issues of the day.⁸¹⁴ He said the Assembly should be grateful to those who had brought about a new era where "the housing of the poor, the pathetic child-life among them, their hardships from uncertainty of unemployment and insufficient earnings, their anxieties about the future, their distresses in sickness and old age.....are profoundly influencing the legislation of our day".⁸¹⁵ But he was insistent that the best hope for society lay in a religious revival and that the tendency to "secularise" the Church in the interests of the poor had to be resisted.⁸¹⁶ He said that that physical conditions of the poor depended on their moral conditions, which in turn reflected their spiritual condition.⁸¹⁷ He saw little place for prophetic social preaching:

Christ never directly intervened in the political or economic questions of his age. He refused to be a judge and divider between claimants for earthly goods, and he warned against covetousness. At the same time, he and his apostles enforced the civic duties. It therefore becomes

⁸¹⁴ *Reports and Proceedings*, 1911, Proceedings p 44

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 43

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p 47

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p 45

the preacher to expound the social implications of Christianity. These themes, however, are soon exhausted, and the frequent handling of them sometimes wearies those who are in complete sympathy with the preacher.⁸¹⁸

Attention has already been drawn to Robert Drummond's recognition, in presenting the report of the Special Committee on Social Problems at the 1911 General Assembly of the importance of the Kingdom of God in the exploration of social theology.⁸¹⁹ He also drew attention to the clear tension he sensed between his Committee and the wider Church. Speaking to the proposal that a special committee of eighteen be appointed with a watching brief over social issues, Drummond asked: "But is the Church sure that she has a social mission? This Committee stands for the recognition of it, but the whole movement of which it is a part is often spoken of with suspicion".⁸²⁰

The suspicion which Drummond sensed is apparent in the support which the Glasgow elder Buyers Black found for his opposition to virtually the entire content of the Special Committee's report. The Special Committee's proposal that the government should be asked to create a tribunal to arbitrate in industrial disputes was deleted, as was its request that the Assembly "welcome" a series of booklets it had commissioned on social issues, including one written by Robert Drummond. A proposal to hold a Labour week in Glasgow was amended to require the prior permission of the Presbytery of Glasgow, and it was decided that the cost of the Labour week should

⁸¹⁸ Ibid., p 4

⁸¹⁹ See above p xx **(TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL VERSION)**

⁸²⁰ *Reports and Proceedings*, 1911, Proceedings, p 335

not be met from central funds but the Special Committee would have to raise the costs itself.

Evidence of the underlying opposition to Church's close involvement in social issues may lie in the appointment at the General Assembly of 1911 of the Professor of Christian Ethics and Practical Training at Trinity College in Glasgow. There were three candidates, but, as George Reith recorded in his reminiscences of the Assembly, the choice was in reality between two of them: Robert Drummond and William Clow. The majority in the Assembly voted for Clow.⁸²¹ Granted the high profile which Drummond had in the General Assemblies of the United Free Church for several previous years, and the significance of Clow's attack on the drift of Drummond's committees, it is difficult not to see the election of Clow on the floor of the Assembly as a further indication of the theological divergence between those who pursued for the sake of the Kingdom of God a policy of involving the Church more and more in social concerns and those who believed that the economy of the Kingdom required a degree of distance between the Church as an institution and the world of secular and social affairs. It is equally difficult not to regard Clow's success in the election as a victory for the latter.

It is possible that, in presenting the various overtures regarding social work to the General Assembly of 1908, Revd Colin Gibb of Glasgow – someone George Reith describes as having well known socialist leanings⁸²² - may have inadvertently given evidence that those opposed to the direction the Church was taking had some justification for their view. He said of the Secretary of the Life and Work Committee,

⁸²¹ REITH, *Reminiscences*, p 124

⁸²² REITH, *Reminiscences*, p 115

and later of the Special Committee on Social Work, John D Robertson of Leith, who had been at college with Robert Drummond, that two years earlier he had led the Church *almost unknown to itself*, [my emphasis] upon these lines of enquiry and if the text of the Report of the Life and Work Committee, for which he was solely responsible (had) been in their hands, the overtures would have been differently framed". Gibb was indicating that the significance of the step which the United Free Church took as a result of the overtures in 1908 was already foreseen in the Life and Work reports which Robertson inspired. It is possible that the part Robertson played in moving the United Free Church in the direction of social reform has been as little recorded as has the pivotal role of his namesake Frederick Lockhart Robertson in the Church of Scotland's Presbytery of Glasgow, but the documentary evidence does not exist to substantiate the claim.

There is, however, evidence of John Robertson's representing the United Free Church's view outside its General Assembly. In 1912, the Liberal Government appointed a Royal Commission to investigate the housing of the industrial population of Scotland. Two prominent members of the United Free Church, the theologian and landowner George Freeland Barbour, and James Barr, the minister of St Mary's United Free Church in Govan, who later took over the chair, were both members of the Commission, to which John Robertson gave evidence as, by then, Convener of the Life and Work Committee and Secretary of the Social Problems Committee of the United Free Church.⁸²³

⁸²³ *Report of the Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population of Scotland rural and urban, Minutes of Evidence*, Volume 1, pp 129-136, 14 March, 1913

Robertson was questioned at the start of his evidence about the view of the United Free Church that small and overcrowded houses produce indecency and immorality⁸²⁴ and he was also examined by members of the Commission (one of them Freeland Barbour) who clearly did not think that the connection had been sufficiently established.⁸²⁵ Robertson gave evidence concerning the extortionate profits alleged to be made through farmed out housing which, he said, contributed to the spread of immorality as nightly letting encouraged prostitution,⁸²⁶ and he was again closely questioned about what he would do with those who could only afford to rent a room on a nightly basis and what accommodation there was for them.⁸²⁷ Robertson gave as his personal opinion that he was opposed to all single roomed houses except for single people or couples without children, that for every house with two rooms or more there should be a toilet in every house, and a wash-house for every four or five families, and when asked how, if the Commission did decide that there should be a minimum standard of accommodation such as Robertson suggested, those on low wages could afford it. Robertson's answer was a state-enforced minimum wage.⁸²⁸

In fact the Commission took the view that rather than the State raise wages compulsorily, the State should, for a period of at least fourteen years and acting through municipalities, provide housing at affordable rent, though there was a minority report from four members of the Commission, including Freeland Barbour, which took the view that the local authorities could not bear the cost of housing alone and recommended that the State would have to provide subsidies for private enterprise

⁸²⁴ Ibid., paras 2024, 2016

⁸²⁵ Ibid., paras 2022-2026, 2133-2138.

⁸²⁶ Ibid., para 2039, 2040

⁸²⁷ Ibid., para 2070.

⁸²⁸ Ibid., paras 2103-2112

to build houses at affordable, but uneconomic rents.⁸²⁹ It seems very likely that the evidence which Robertson gave went far beyond anything the United Free Church general Assembly would have been likely to support, possibly further fuelling the division on social issues within the Church.

⁸²⁹ <http://www.bopcris.ac.uk/bopall/ref8602.html>, p 1, accessed 13.12.2006

Conclusion

Until 1908 there had been a growing consensus in both the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church that part of their role as Churches was to engage in social issues, to improve social conditions and, wherever possible, to alleviate poverty. That developing social commitment was both mirrored in and stimulated by a parallel growth in the Churches' understanding of the Kingdom of God.

The consensus, however, was breaking down by 1908. It became clear, especially with William Clow's speech attacking the involvement of the Church in social criticism, and the considerable support that Clow received for this position, that within the United Free Church there were very different understandings about the meaning of the Kingdom of God and its special significance.

S. J. Brown has seen the political divisions following the ending of the war in 1918 as significant in persuading leaders of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church to "silence the Church's call for a new social order". He attributes this to "post-war exhaustion, disillusionment and anxiety particularly among the middle class who made up the bulk of the membership of the two Churches, as well as a reaction to social division and industrial unrest". He has further observed that

For the Churches to remain behind their wartime pledges to
reconstruction would now be to set themselves against the Government,

and possibly to alienate middle-class Church members who were taking the anti-socialist cause to heart. In the face of growing social division, it seemed that the best course for the Church would be to withdraw from any involvement in social reform. It should proclaim itself neutral on social issues and restrict itself to spiritual work⁸³⁰

As we have seen, there is evidence that the commitment to social criticism and reform was unravelling in the United Free Church of Scotland from 1908, though the Church of Scotland appears to have been relatively unaffected by the tensions which beset the United Free Church. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the agreement broadly to divide the responsibilities of the two Churches, leaving social criticism to the United Free Church and social welfare to the Church of Scotland meant that there were far more opportunities for strong differences of opinion to appear in debates in the United Free Church Assembly than in that of the Church of Scotland. Second, the Church of Scotland, which broadly identified itself with the Conservative Party, was less likely to include people who wanted to respond positively and enthusiastically to the reforming measures of the 1906 Liberal Government than was the United Free Church. Third, the United Free Church contained both Conservative and Liberal elements in uneasy coalition. Its ministry included men like the conservative William Clow and the moderate socialist A. Scott Matheson, and in the United Free Church General Assembly for debate on social issues, divisions over the Liberal Government's social reforms was unavoidable. Fourth, there was an assumption within the Church of Scotland that as an established church, it was part of a partnership with civic, industrial and political institutions. . In a sense David Watson

⁸³⁰ BROWN, S.J., "The Social Vision of Scottish Presbyterianism and the Union of 1929" in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 1992

represented the effortless assumptions of an established Church minister, whereas William Clow, William Dickie and Scott Matheson represented a nonconformist Church which, though confident in itself, was still struggling to identify what its role ought to be within Scottish society. Fifth, in the tumultuous years between 1910 and the outbreak of war it became increasingly clear that social improvements were not producing stable conditions. The dramatic and extensive intrusion of the state into social welfare did not prevent a number of serious social and political crises that shook the entire edifice of the United Kingdom from about 1910 onwards.. Social welfare as a route towards the Kingdom of God was, if not discredited, then at least tarnished. If the expansion of social welfare could not produce a stable and harmonious society it was unlikely to bring in the Kingdom of God.

In addition to these factors, the energies of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church became focused on ecclesiastical concerns. From 1909 until the outbreak of war in 1914, and then from 1918 onwards, the movement towards reunion grew apace. As S. J. Brown writes, “in concentrating for so long on the pragmatic policies of ecclesiastical union, Church leaders had lost grip with the chief end of the Church – as witness to the coming Kingdom of God.”⁸³¹

The unravelling of a commitment to social criticism within the United Free Church must also be seen against the background of the unravelling of the easy confidence of Edwardian Britain. In the years leading up to the war there were a succession of strikes, there was considerable feminist violence. Looking back on the period in 1935, George Dangerfield described

⁸³¹ BROWN, S.J., 1991, “Reform, Reconstruction and Reaction: The Social Vision of Scottish Presbyterianism c.1830-c1930” in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol 44, 991 p 517

the sudden class hatred, the unexpected violence, the irrational moods, which makes (the unrest) an essential, a sanguine part of pre-war psychology, yet the immediate causes of it have a very different look. Grim and grey as they are, they direct us not to life but to death – to the unpleasantly decaying death of Liberal democracy.⁸³²

In discussing Dangerfield's view, G R Searle concedes that "there may be some substance in the view that between 1910 and 1914 the country was experiencing a 'crisis of the state.'"⁸³³ The debates in the United Free Church General Assembly have to be seen in the context of what Paul Johnston has described in his introduction to the 1966 edition of Dangerfield's book as "a society in process of decomposition". He continues "Its values and attitudes were already being pulverised under the impact of new social, political and economic forces".⁸³⁴

The social, political and economic forces which "pulverised" early 20th century Britain were serious labour unrest, the threat of class warfare, the increasingly violent suffragette movement and the danger of sectarian civil war in Ireland as a result of the third Home Rule Bill. All of these had an effect on the Churches' social and political concern and commitment and also on the connection the Churches made between the Kingdom of God and developments in society.

⁸³² DANGERFIELD, G., 1935, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, 1966 Edition, London

⁸³³ SEARLE, G R., 2004, *A New England?* Oxford p 471

⁸³⁴ DANGERFIELD, G., 1935, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, 1966 Edition, London, *Introduction*

What C.G. Brown calls “the secularisation of social prophecy”⁸³⁵ led to the moderate socialism of men like A. Scott Matheson being identified with much more radically socialist elements, and, as Brown puts it, “the rise of militant socialism.....destroyed the apolitical Christian-socialist movement within the Presbyterian Churches, and left the Church socialists as a politicised and small minority”.⁸³⁶

Middle Class support for Churches advocating the coming Kingdom of God was likely to dissipate as moderate socialists became identified with dangerous radicalism. At the same time the growth of suburban housing changed the relationship of those who moved to the suburbs with urban society and made Churches places for people’s leisure activity rather than their commitment to the Kingdom of God.

As commuters on trams, the inner-city areas were places of work from which to retreat at evening time and weekends to more pleasant houses and gardens. Their new Churches came to symbolize their prosperity and their cultural concerns, with the Church hall developing as a busy recreation centre with an intensive programme of daily events. The range of pursuits and organisations catered for all ages and tastes; as well as Sunday schools and Band of hope, there were women’s guilds, girls’ guilds, fellowships and young men’s and women’s societies providing activities like literary and drama clubs, rambling, summer retreats, golf clubs and curling clubs.⁸³⁷

⁸³⁵ BROWN, C.G., 1990 “Each take off their several way? The protestant Church and the Working Classes in Scotland” in WALKER, G., and GALLAGHER, T., 1990 *Sernmons and Battle Hymns*, Edinburgh, p 81

⁸³⁶ Ibid., p 80

⁸³⁷ BROWN C.G., 1987, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland since 1730*, London, p 179

Evidence for the Great Labour Unrest is clear in the statistic that between 1909 and 1912 the days lost in strikes rose from 2,690,000 in 1909 to 40, 890,000 in 1912. This increase was caused by a small number of acrimonious strikes in key industries employing large numbers of workers. In 1910 there was a strike of miners in the Rhondda Valley. The following year the Sailors; and Fireman's Union and the Railway Workers called national strikes, and troops had to be deployed in Liverpool and North Wales. In 1912 there was a Miners' strike and then a Dockers' strike. Between 1910 and 1914, membership of trades unions rose by 60%.

G. R. Searle comments that the Great Labour Unrest had a dramatic impact on the governing Liberal Party, and those in it who "saw the advocacy of class conflict as the negation of all that (they) held dear – social harmony, consensus resulting from reasoned discussion". The Great Labour Unrest, however, also impacted on the optimistic view of the Kingdom of God held in the Churches. In 1908, David Watson had insisted that "Social unrest is itself a good sign, a mark of vigorous life, not of decadence," and it is a divine discontent with social wrong".⁸³⁸ A Scott Matheson had claimed that "socialism needs to be Christianised and Christianity needs to be socialised".⁸³⁹ But it was impossible to sustain such sanguine views when it appeared troops were necessary to restrain social unrest and political violence believed to be socialist inspired.

The Liberal government's attitude to Home Rule also posed problems for those who had been able, somewhat simplistically, to identify the Kingdom of God with a growing belief in the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. There were

⁸³⁸ WATSON, D., *Social Problems*, p 5

⁸³⁹ MATHESON, A.S., 1890, *The Gospel and Modern Substitutes*, Edinburgh, pp 176-7

those in the Asquith cabinet who wanted to link Irish Home Rule to proposals for a wider extension of home rule within a United Kingdom. One estimate reckoned that sixty of Scotland's seventy-two MPs supported a Scottish parliament.⁸⁴⁰ The possible fragmentation of the United Kingdom may have reflected one aspect of Scottish cultural nationalism. However, paradoxically that same Scottish cultural nationalism was also expressed in its contribution to Britain's imperial identity, and the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church both subscribed to imperial identity in the missionary activity which they supported, though the United Free Church raised for foreign missions twice the amount of the Church of Scotland, and its involvement was correspondingly greater.⁸⁴¹ Just as the possibility of Home Rule was being discussed, the Scottish Churches' involvement with missionary enterprise within the Empire was being highlighted in the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910. However the two Churches had begun to co-operate, uniting their colleges and missions in Calcutta in 1907, and later dividing responsibility for missionary work East and West Africa respectively between the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church. J. R. Fleming comments that there was "little sign that the glow of the enthusiasm for the spread of the Kingdom of Christ in distant lands had faded from the consciousness of the Scottish Church",⁸⁴² but the link between Scotland and these "distant lands" to which the Kingdom of Christ might be extended was questioned.

The emergence of an aggressive suffragette movement caused considerable concern within the Scottish Presbyterian Churches. As E. Halevy had pointed out, suffragette violence was becoming widespread by 1912, and even churches were becoming targets.

⁸⁴⁰ SEARLE, G.R., 2004, *A New England?* Oxford, p 425

⁸⁴¹ FLEMING, J.R., 1933, *The Church of Scotland 1875-1929*, Edinburgh p 171

⁸⁴² *Ibid.*, p 172

In the theatre, at Church, even at Buckingham Palace, the King was roughly addressed by unknown women who rose to denounce him as ‘czar’ and ‘torturer’. Corrosives were placed in letter boxes to destroy the correspondence. Pictures were defaced at museums. Buildings were set on fire whether they belonged to notorious opponents of feminism or were simply adjacent to a home where a Liberal meeting was being held. Shots were fired at trains. Then the suffragettes attacked Churches in which they placed bombs which did considerable damage. Two old country Churches were burnt down.⁸⁴³

The suffragette movement not only caused considerable alarm to the Churches, it caused considerable tension within the Churches. Prominent among those who took the lead in the suffragette cause in Scotland were the wives of ministers or women who had been missionaries. Lean Leneman observed that two women interrupted the United Free Church’s General Assembly in 1913. Later that year three women and men caused a disturbance during a speech by the Solicitor General in South Leith United Free Church which led the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch* to comment that “it will be many a day before the extraordinary scenes of disturbance will be forgotten by those who were present”. A few days later suffragettes shouted slogans during the annual kirking of the judges service in St Giles’, where there were to be several more interruptions in the following twelve months. In February 1914 the Church at Whitekirk was burned by suffragettes wanting to draw attention to the introduction into Scotland of the forced feeding of women protestors in prison, and on 15 March

⁸⁴³ HALEVY, E., 1952, *The Rule of Democracy*, London p525

1914 several Churches across the country witnessed demonstrations during worship.⁸⁴⁴ Leneman suggests that Churches were broadly divided between those in the west, where there was support for the suffragette movement, and those in the east where support was less strong.⁸⁴⁵

The Scottish Churches' League for Woman Suffrage included Churchmen of the stature of Robert J. Drummond of the United Free Church, and in 1913 every Presbytery of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church was asked by an organisation supportive of women's suffrage to pass a resolution and overture the General Assembly in support.

George Reith, reflecting on the effect of the women's campaign on the United Free Church, indicated the level of opposition it encountered and offence it caused when he observed that the suffragette agitation had "plunged [the country] into a campaign of brawling and outrage". He continued,

These lawless women, who resented, as they said, being classed with "imbeciles, lunatics and criminals" were daily guilty of deeds which amply justified the classification. They had deliberately adopted the policy of the mosquito, secure in the conviction that masculine chivalry, which still survived in spite of their provocative antics, would not proceed to extremes against them. But when it came to burning down Churches and other buildings, some began to feel that medieval methods of dealing with impossible females were not

⁸⁴⁴ LEBEMAN, L., 1992, "Scottish Churches and Votes for Woman" in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, Vol 24, pp 237-252

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid., p 252

so unreasonable and unjustifiable as had been generally thought.⁸⁴⁶

While William Clow was hostile to assertions of women's rights, it is perhaps not surprising in the light of suffragette militancy that many who expressed support for women nonetheless wanted them to continue in a traditional role.. Scott Matheson, for example, supported the admission of women to the professions but insisted that their principle role should be in the home. William Dickie extolled the virtue of women in the family as one of his four concentric circles of involvement. While David Watson expressed anger at the degrading of women, he begins his examination of the social expression of Christianity with a defence of traditional forms of marriage and the family.

In the years leading up to the outbreak of war, what C.G. Brown calls "the secularisation of social protest" undermined the social protest which had been, largely, the expression of a growing social theology within the Churches. Brown writes, "The initiative in social and political action was passing out of the hands of activists inspired by religion and the bearers of social salvation were now trade union leaders, socialist intellectuals and labour politicians".⁸⁴⁷ That would not have mattered had these trade union leaders, socialist intellectuals and labour politicians not been seen, however accurately, as unsympathetic or hostile to Christian faith. Their assumption of leadership in social reform tended to discredit social reform as an expression of the Kingdom of God in the eyes of the large number at the time who regarded themselves as political opponents of socialism.

⁸⁴⁶ REITH, g., *Reminiscences*, p 153

⁸⁴⁷ BROWN, C.G., 1987, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland since 1730*, London, p 187

At the same time, the continued movement of the urban population from inner city areas to outlying suburbs, and the consequent concentration of Church life and activity where people lived rather than where they both lived and worked tended to distance the middle class population from concern with and interest in the welfare of the inner city. Increasingly, especially within the United Free Church, congregational life became a focus for social activity rather than evangelical or social work. A Kingdom of God expressed in terms of commitment to the expression of social concern and the improvement of social conditions had to compete against an understanding of the Kingdom of God defined in terms of individual religious involvement with a congregation.

Theologically, a notion of the Kingdom of God expressed in terms of commitment to the expression of social concern and the improvement of social conditions - what Robert Flint has called "Christ's Kingdom upon Earth" - also had to compete against a growing view of the Kingdom of God as something very different. Johannes Weiss' *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* in 1892, and then in the definite second edition of 1900, followed by Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, which appeared in English translation in 1910, concluded that the Kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus was very far from the realisable goal which Scotland's Churchmen, following Robert Flint, had thought it to be. It was, rather, thoroughly eschatological.

In 1910, as the country began to experience the "crisis of state", and as the English edition of Schweitzer's *Quest* appeared, Robert Flint died. It is ironic that his revolutionary idea that the Kingdom of God would be advanced by, amongst others,

“a legislator obtaining good laws” led to the view that the Church itself had a social mission being questioned. Precisely because the state was becoming increasingly involved in social welfare, opponents of the Church’s involvement with society were able to argue forcefully that there was no longer any need for the Church to be involved, or at least to be involved at its current level.

CONCLUSION

This study covers years which saw enormous changes in Scotland. Its population more than doubled between 1830 and the outbreak of the first world war, by which time most people in the country were housed in cities. Whereas only one in eight Scottish males had the right to vote after the great Reform Act of 1832, by 1914 the franchise had been extended to all adult males and the pressure for women's suffrage was to prove irresistible.

Over the period of this study, the Church's involvement with the poor changed from being a statutory obligation to being a voluntary commitment. Town Councils and City Corporations no longer had any part to play in the business of the Church. The Church lost its control of the country's provision for the poor and for education. As a result of the Disruption, the membership of the Church of Scotland dropped by 40%, and the established Church was no longer able to claim to be the sole moral voice of the nation or the only religious reference point in Scotland's particular national identity. It was much more difficult for the Church to portray itself as a source of social cohesion at the beginning of the twentieth century than it was in the days of Thomas Chalmers, and with the growing extension of the role of the State the Church had to develop social policy and theology as one among many voluntary bodies.

C.G. Brown sees what he calls the "evangelicalism" of the middle classes as the means by which the Church came to terms with its changing role within a changing society. "Evangelicalism demanded personal commitment through voluntary effort in Sunday schools, Bible classes, tract distribution, home visiting, the temperance soiree, and hundreds of other related activities.....Spurning theological debate it called

citizens to action in the name of God, the economy and the individual”⁸⁴⁸ Brown is certainly right to point to the growth of congregational activities as a significant change in the Church’s role during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the social function which the congregation increasingly played in the lives of church members. Two Lord Provosts of the time, Sir Samuel Chisholm and Sir Daniel Macaulay Stevenson wanted to make Glasgow a Christian municipality. However the increase in congregational organisations and the involvement of Christian businessmen and local politicians, significant would not have been sufficient in themselves to explain why the leadership of the Churches increasingly became committed to seeing the Church as an agent of social reform. Presbyterian Churches, which saw themselves as the heirs of the Scottish Reformation required a theological justification for regarding conversion and Church membership as no longer sufficient agents of individual improvement and social reform. The leadership of the Churches needed to be able to place their response to the changes in society and in the Church’s role within a context which gave theological expression to the relationship of Church to Society. If such a context could not be provided, then the evangelicalism of the middle classes and the contribution of Christian businessmen involved in local politics would not have been able to bring about the social revolution within what A.C. Cheyne called “the transforming of the Kirk”.

Only an unbalanced view of Patrick Brewster ignores the political ineptitude and personal arrogance which reduced the impact of his social radicalism, tarnished the effect of his personal commitment to the poor, and gave a respectability to the rejection of the values he espoused and the causes he supported. Only too critical a

⁸⁴⁸ BROWN, C.G., 1997, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, Edinburgh, p 102

view of Brewster's contemporaries dismisses the very real contributions both to the improving of social conditions and to an engagement with social issues of men like Robert Burns and Robert Buchanan, both of whom have unfairly been regarded as complacent towards the social conditions of their day. Only a romantic view of Norman Macleod does not recognise that he did not sufficiently recognise that the urban crisis required something more radical than a more efficiently organised church and social theology needed a more critical vision than continuation of the existing structures of society injected with human kindness.

As we have seen, the Church was the prism through which Brewster and Burns, Buchanan and Macleod all viewed society, and the changes within it. They believed that it was through the consequences of the poor's conversion, in response to the Church's evangelism, that people would improve their condition and escape from poverty. It is unfair of Donald Smith almost to imply that mid nineteenth century churchmen chose that view from a range of options. As A.C. Cheyne puts it, "because a distinctively Christian approach to commerce, industry and the problems of community life was lacking, all tended to be given over to the mercies of contemporary economic theory".⁸⁴⁹ There was no model available which provided a context within which the mid-nineteenth century Church could examine the relationship of the Church to such a rapidly changing Society until Robert Flint's theology of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Flint's initial insistence that the Church and the Kingdom of God were not identical was the means by which the Church was released from regarding itself as holding the

⁸⁴⁹ CHEYNE, A.C., 1983, *The Transforming of the Kirk*, Edinburgh, p 112

only key to social advance, and also the context within which the work of other agencies within Society, and, eventually the State itself could be harnessed to a specifically Christian ideal. At the time Flint's separation of Church and Kingdom was novel and original. He lived to see the view become commonplace. Flint's view of the Kingdom of God as a social rather than an eschatological reality, and his belief in the gradual, evolutionary development of the Kingdom of God on earth had two effects. First they enabled the Church to regard changes in society not simply as pragmatic responses to specific social problems but as part of a divine plan. So God was still working his purpose out. Second, Flint's views allowed the Church to regard the loss of its role in administering the poor law and in education, and the extension first of municipal and then state power not as matters for regret and evidence of marginalisation but as developments to welcome and contributions to the Christian ideal.

Robert Flint has been regarded as a very significant figure in the history of Scotland's contribution to theology and to the history of ideas. *Christ's Kingdom upon Earth* has been virtually ignored, and so the vital contribution which he made to the development of the Church's social theology and practice has been overlooked. He had considerable influence on the thinking of Donald Macleod and John Marshall Lang, and he provided the necessary theological basis for their involvement, along with F.L. Robertson in an examination of Glasgow's housing conditions.

The Presbytery of Glasgow and Macleod and Marshall Lang have been given a great deal of credit for the establishment of the Housing Commission. The support of men with such a high profile in the Church and the community was very significant but a

number of things require to be noticed. First, Macleod was always more radical than the cautious Marshall Lang. Second, Macleod's and Marshall Lang's views did not always coincide. They differed personally on total abstinence and also, most clearly, over the extent to which intemperance contributed to deprivation. Marshall Lang was certain it was a cause, Macleod was more inclined to think it was an effect. Macleod was far more critical of the Church as an institution than Marshall Lang. The aim of minister of the Barony was always to bring more people into the Church whereas the minister of the Park always saw a wider ministry than that. Marshall Lang. Third, the role of Frederick Lockhart Robertson in making the Presbytery appoint a Housing Commission, in pursuing what became the central recommendation of establishing a Housing Association, and in harnessing wider support up the Commission's conclusions within the city was crucial and has received no attention. Fourth the Presbytery's involvement with social issues in general and housing in particular caused dissension within the Presbytery, and was the result of a very long, slow process of involving the Presbytery in social issues. There is no evidence that when Kirk Sessions were asked either to contribute evidence to or carry out investigations for the Presbytery there was any interest at all in doing so, and the debates in the Presbytery on housing issues attracted very little interest from the Presbytery's membership. Involvement in A.C. Cheyne's "social revolution" in transforming the Kirk was very much a minority interest.

Insufficient notice has been taken of the fact that there is evidence to support the criticism made at the time of the Presbytery of Glasgow's Housing Commission that it was heavily weighted in favour of landlords and their agents, and that, although the

Commission was rigorous in its assessment of housing conditions, it still regarded the Church's evangelical role to have priority over any social involvement.

The considerable attention paid to the Church of Scotland Presbytery's Housing Commission has led to the attitude of the United Free Church being underplayed. The evidence of the United Free Church was not the subject of as much scrutiny and debate within its Glasgow Presbytery as was the established Church's Housing Commission. However what was said to the Municipal Housing Commission indicates at the local level considerable disagreement between the two Churches on the Churches' attitude to social questions and housing, although the two Presbyteries still held to the view that the territorial or parochial system was capable of continuing to carry the responsibility for the Churches' urban commitments. However, the United Free Church was much more critical of the Churches' failure to tackle the housing problem, and much less equivocal in condemning intemperance as the primary cause of social deprivation. The United Free Church was also much more willing to condemn landlords and their agents than was the Church of Scotland. Although the Church of Scotland's Housing Commission has been criticised by Donald Smith for failing to recommend the provision of municipal housing, the United Free Church minister on the Municipal housing Commission, Robert Howie, argued strongly in favour municipal housing, and for the purchase of suburban land on which it could be built.

Robert Flint's views on the Kingdom of God not only provided the theological context in which the Church's practical involvement in housing in Glasgow could be undertaken by those he had influenced. They also provided the currency of debate

about social issues which, in the years which followed the debates on housing in the Church of Scotland's Presbytery of Glasgow and General assembly, moved to the General assembly of the United Free Church. There were a number of reasons for this. Diversity within the United Free Church, resulting from the union of differing strands, was more likely to encourage theological debate than was usual within the Church of Scotland. However the agreement reached between the two Churches in 1909, that the Church of Scotland should concentrate on social action while the United Free Church should primarily concern itself with the expression of social theology was pivotal.

The debate about whether or not the Church should be involved in the practicalities of social reform was carried out within the context of a debate about the nature of the Kingdom of God. Those who believed that the Kingdom of God was essentially a question of personal commitment to God's revealed vision for the world thought that the Kingdom would be advanced through the divinely inspired work of Christians undertaking responsibility in society. Those who were convinced that the Kingdom of God required the active involvement of the Church along with other institutions within society wanted to commit the Church to specific areas of policy change. The spectrum of views about the Kingdom is seen in the views of David Watson, William Clow, Scott Matheson and William Dickie. Watson is the one of the four who was a Church of Scotland minister and he represents the established Church's conviction about the Church's central, though not exclusive role in the advancement of the Kingdom of God, while being totally committed to the social engagement of the Church, and convinced of the overarching importance of environmental factors over individual ones in causing poverty. William Clow, in the United Free Church,

represents the clearest opposition to that view, being convinced that the Church's responsibility is only to produce Christians and the responsibility for establishing a Christian society rested solely on them. While the Church of Scotland recognised that environmental considerations were significant in determining the level of religious commitment, Clow vehemently disagreed, and he saw very little place for the involvement of the institutional Church in the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Although Scott Matheson of Dumbarton recognises no limits to the areas of society in which the Church has a right to be involved and on which it has a duty to comment, uniquely, he regards the advancement of the Kingdom of God not only as a desirable end in itself but one which enables the gospel of personal salvation to be preached. Whereas Matheson sees the transformed society of the Kingdom of God as the context within which individual salvation can be preached, William Dickie regards the conversion of the individual as the necessary precursor of the regeneration of society.

The General Assembly became the focus of debate about the Kingdom of God in the early years of the twentieth century. These debates not only provided a forum for the range of views represented by Watson, Clow, Matheson and Dickie to come into contact and sometimes conflict, they also illustrate how the Church's social theology was no longer being developed with reference to the Church itself, but within the far wider context of the Kingdom of God. That context and language for some time disguised the radical differences there were in various interpretations of the Kingdom of God, and it was only when these became apparent that fundamental disagreements about the role and place of the Church became apparent.

The conservative William Clow was a pivotal figure in the United Free Church General Assembly's developing understanding of the Kingdom of God and its relationship to social issues. Differences of opinion about the Kingdom of God, and therefore about the Church's social role did not really surface in the debates of the United Free Church General Assembly until 1908, when two important developments took place. First, in an aggressive and powerful speech, William Clow delivered a strong attack on the Church's Home Mission Committee and its conviction that the Church had any business dealing with housing, poverty and squalor. Second, eight overtures specifically requested the Church to examine its social mission and take some action in the area of social questions. Clow's speech brought the underlying differences to a head and ensured that the Kingdom of God would no longer be expressed in vague generalities capable of universal assent.

The United Free Church Assembly the following year was presented with a report outlining what the Kingdom of God involved. Donald Smith's judgment that this statement reflects a new social and theological liberalism is less convincing when that statement is seen against the range of views which could have been included but were not, and in the context of the conflicting views which William Clow provoked. The subsequent debates in the U.F. Assembly in the years leading up to the outbreak of war indicate much less enthusiasm for the Church's social engagement than Smith's view that "the most prominent indication of the social awakening in the U.F. Church in the years before the First World War was the activity of the General Assembly itself" would suggest.⁸⁵⁰ Smith goes on to describe the U.F. General Assemblies of 1909 and 1910 as "witnessing another landmark in the gradual recovery of Christian

⁸⁵⁰ SMITH, D., *Passive Obedience*, p 340

social criticism”.⁸⁵¹ If so, the social criticism was less explicit than many wanted and the landmark less imposing than Smith’s judgment implies. Certainly Clow’s victory over the much more liberal Robert Drummond in the contest for the Trinity College chair at the 1911 General Assembly is an indication of the General Assembly’s rejection rather than its recovery of social criticism.

Rather than being the exponent of renewed social criticism, the United Free Church General Assembly provides evidence of the unravelling of a commitment to social criticism in the face of the collapse of Edwardian confidence in the face of industrial tension, labour unrest, suffragette aggression and a politically active labour movement, and the theological challenge to Flint’s view of the Kingdom of God on earth from Johannes weiss and Albert Schweitzer. When Robert Flint died in 1910, the theological journey he began, and the practical expression of social Christianity which he inspired, had come full circle.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid., p 343

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